M. Umar

Kitab Mahal Series on English Literature No. 57

MASTER GUIDE TO THE PROLOGUE

Prof. Bashir Hussain M.A.

KITAB MAHAL
URDU BAZAR
LAHORE (W. PAKISTAN)

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THE PROLOGUE

By

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CHAUCER'S PROLOGUE

A General Estimate of Chaucer as a Poet.

Chaucer occupies a very important position in the history of English Literature. As Compton Rickett has pointed out in *A history of English Literature* : "Chaucer symbolises, as no other writer does, the Middle Ages. He stands in much the same relation to the life of his time as Pope does to the earlier phases of the eighteenth century, and Tennyson to the Victorian era ; and his place in English literature is even more important than theirs, for he is the first great English writer—the first man to use 'naked words' in English ; the first to make our composite language a thing compact and vital".

Giving a general estimate of Chaucer as a poet Emil Legouis has observed in the book, *Geoffrey Chaucer* : "Truth was his magnet. He had found poetry unnatural ; people had got to think that fiction was its essence and its task to present an ingenious transposition of reality according to artificial rules. He began by obeying the accepted canons ; like his contemporaries he had dreams and saw allegorical figures ; he invented imaginary incidents ; or he borrowed from books the subjects and characters of his poems. All along it is true he had a desire to be independent, and to put into these conventions more life and observation than they seemed to warrant. Little by little he began to realise that nothing could equal nature herself in interest and diversity. Then it was that leaving his learning in the background, and freeing himself from dreams and allegories, he looked straight at the spectacle of life and men, and began to reproduce it unaided. The docility he

had shown towards his favourite authors, he now brought to the service of nature alone. Instead of the *Roman de la Rose*, Boccaccio or Ovid. Nature was henceforth the source of his inspiration and his law. He became according to his subject her scribe or her painter.

"But this faithful presentation of reality may be, as is well known, harsh, morose or bitter; and men, on beholding it, often turn away from life in disgust. Chaucer without flattering his model puts it in a pleasant light in an atmosphere which is sweet to breathe. One cannot read him without feeling that it is good to be alive.

"Our first impression when we take up his work is one of freshness and health, which seems to come to us from every side. It is due first of all to the use of a newly formed dialect, the words of which had hardly been used as yet for literary purposes. Like the soil freshly ploughed in April, it has then a perfume which it does not possess at any other time. Generally, this newness of the language goes along with a certain crudeness of thought with an art childish as yet. But Chaucer, who stands at the beginning of English poetry, stands also at the close of the Middle Ages. He inherited the whole literature of France enriched by the generous efforts of three centuries elegant in style, abundant in stories, exhibiting already signs of fatigue and over-production. He realised that combination, of which there is perhaps no other example, of a springlike language with an autumnal literature. Chaucer, very young, and yet very mature, combines the charm of new-born things with the experience of old age. His naive expression gave back the grace of novelty to more than one description, more than one idea which had paled and faded in the language in which they were first written. English words hitherto locked in a long winter of expectation, gave out in his already learned verse, their first perfume.

"To this advantage, due to exceptional circumstances, he joins gifts all his own, the first of which is a wide sympathy. To this especially his poetry owes its friendli-

ness and smiling affability. The joy of being alive or of beholding life, the pleasure of being amongst men, these are everywhere in his verse. He entertains, of course, towards some of his fellow men an affection or respect but all the others seem nevertheless to arouse in him a curiosity akin to interest. No one is excluded, and aversion is a very rare thing with him. He does not treat with disdain those whose foolishness he has fathomed, nor does he turn away in disgust from the rascal whose tricks he has detected. These still have some curious or funny traits which can amuse a good man. Vice is interesting to study if only because it differs from virtue. Whilst quietly unmasking the rogues, he is grateful to them in his heart for the pleasure they give him, and which compensates for much that is evil. Moreover, he repudiates the somewhat childish conception which divides men up into good and bad. He knows that human character is a much more complex blend than it is usually painted. He has no delusions about himself and realises without bitterness that he is not violently impelled towards good. He classes himself with the average humanity and so finds himself in touch with the mass.

"The reader does not find in him a mentor, but an equal, who would fain to be looked upon as an inferior, a good-natured companion always ready to make place for somebody else or to let him have his say first. Far from pretending to teach others, he listens with attention, some might say, with respect. Humour does flash now and then from his eyes which he purposely keeps half shut. But there is no need to be anxious, for it is obviously at himself that he is laughing. It is very difficult to catch him in the act of mocking laughter under cover of his air of modesty, for after all this modesty is not wholly feigned; it is based on a knowledge of the curious working of human nature and consequently of his own nature also. The consciousness of their common failings is what draws men together. Amongst writers of genius the one who strikes us soonest as a friend is Chaucer.

"A sympathy of this kind, based on self-knowledge, is a form of intelligence. And perhaps if I had to express in one word the advance made by Chaucer, I would say that he represents a progress of the intellegence. It is marked on the one hand by a weakening of passion, based on self-confidence, on strong desires and aspirations, on love or hate, and which leads to lyricism or satire, a weakening also of the imagination as a faculty for transforming or exaggerating reality and projecting it on a distinct and partly arbitrary plane, thus making for epic, romantic or allegorical poerty. On the other hand, pride of place is given to the pleasure of observing and understanding which is only possible when the personality of the author has been subdued. This peaceful and loyal observation of life did not exist before Chaucer, at least not in the same degree. There were, of course, works more noble and more essentially poetical, such as the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Divina Commedia*, to take two widely differing instances. There were more exquisite ones filled with quivering passion amongst the works of the French song-writers which, beginning with the romances of the twelfth century, lead to Rutebeuf, and thence a hundred years after Chaucer, to Villon, in whom they reach the apex of their development. There was, moreover, in Patrarch's sonnets a refinement of feeling and language scarcely attained by Chaucer. But where shall we find, except in Chaucer, a work where the principal aim has been to portray men truthfully, without exalting or disparaging them, and to present an exact picture of average humanity? Chaucer sees things as they are, and paints them as he sees them. He restrains himself in order the better to observe.

"Thus this Englishman who breaks through the darkness which shrouded the literature of his county, and who for two centuries remained without a true successor; this writer who is still hampered at times by an imperfect syntax, who is saturated with scholasticism, whose memory is loaded with biblical or profane allusions, whose astrological sky is peopled with stars stranger to European eyes

todays than those of the South Seas; this docile translator of multifarious or often antiquated works—really opened up new literary fields. A graceful and tender poet exiled for his sin of humour from the highest regions of poetry, curiosity was certainly stronger in him than faith, and the joys of the senses and of the mind more keen than the rapture of enthusiasm. The things he saw interested him much more than those he dreamt of. The speeches he heard always seemed to him somehow entertaining and even truthful, were it only as adequate signs of the speaker's nature and breeding. He leads the group of amused and good-natured observers, who will accept as a fact the motley fabric of society, without wishing to dye to a uniform colour the many stands that compose it Doubtless certain colours seemed to him more beautiful than others, but it was in the contrast presented by them all that he founded at once his philosophy of life and the laws of his art".

Giving a general estimate of Chaucer. Hudson has observed in *An Outline History of English Literature* :

"Chaucer was not in any sense a poet of the people. He was a court poet, who wrote for cultured readers and a refined society. The great vital issues of the day never inspired his verse. He made his appeal to an audience composed of the favoured few, who wanted to be amused by comedy, or touched by pathos, or moved by romantic sentiment, but who did not wish to be disturbed by painful reminders of plagues, famines, and popular discontent. Thus, though he holds the mirror up to life of his time, the dark underside of it is nowhere reflected by him. It is significant that his only mention of the Peasants' Revolt is in the form of a humorous reference in the *Nonnes Priests Tale* of the Cock and the Fox. It is true, that, as we have seen, he felt the religious corruptions of the world about him, and not only his satiric portraits of unworthy churchmen, but also his beautiful companion study of the poor parson, who was indeed no hireling; but a real shepherd, show his

sympathy in a general way with some of Wycliff's ideas. But on the whole he left burning questions alone. His was an easy-going, genial, tolerant nature, and nothing of the reformer went to its composition. The serious note is indeed sometimes heard in his poetry ; as when, for example, he writes :

> That thee is sent receyve in buxomnesse
> The wrastling of this world asketh a fal ;
> Here is nohoom, here is but wildernesse.
> Forth, pilgrim, forth ! forth, best out of they stal
> Look upon hye, and thonk God of al.

But this is not its characteristic tone ; its characteristic tone is that of frank pleasure in the good things of life. Chaucer's temperament thus explains his relations with his age. Little touched by its religious or social movements, he responded readily to the influence of Italian humanism, and it is through him that its free secular spirit first expresses itself in our poetry. If Wycliff was 'the morning star of the Reformation', Chaucer may be called 'the morning star of the Renaissance.'

"A specially charming feature of his poetry is its fresh out-of-doors atmosphere. His descriptions of the country are often indeed in the conventional manner of his time, and his garden landscape and Mayflowers are to some extent things of tradition only. But he has a real love of nature and particularly of the spring, and when he writes of these, as in the *Prologue* and the *Knightes Tale*, the personal accent is unmistakable."

"Canterbury Tales" as the Mirror of Fourteenth Century England.

In the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer has given us a fine picture of the fourteenth century England, especially her social and religious conditions. Having a deep and lively interest in the everyday life of all sorts of people living

around him, and endowed with a keen power of observation, he has described his characters and narrated their tales so realistically that we can almost reconstruct the fourteenth century England through them. As the characters represent different strata of society, and belong to different professions, taken as a whole, they reflect the varied aspects of the life of those times.

The most important event of the fourteenth century, which had shaken the entire life of the country, was the Black Death. It visited England four times, and it proved to be so destructive that at least one-half of the population, including two-thirds of the inhabitants of the capital, had been carried off by the ravages of the obstinate epidemic. In the description of the Doctor of Physics in the *Prologue*, Chaucer throws some light on the helplessness of the fourteenth century medical science. For though in all the world there was none like this doctor, to speak of physics and of surgery; though he was a very perfect practitioner, and never at a loss for telling the cause of any malady and supplying the patient with the appropriate drug, sent in by the doctor's old and faithful friends, the apothecaries, yet the basis of his scientific knowledge was 'astronomy,' *i.e.*, astrology. The thing of which he was most careful was money, which he collected in sufficient quantity during the pestilence :—

He kepte that he won pestilence.
For gold in physic is a cordial;
Therefore he loved gold in special.

The fourteenth century England was rich and prosperous. There were quite a number of great landed proprietors, and "worthy vavasours" (smaller landowners) who, like Chaucer's Franklin—a very Sain Julian or pattern of hospitality—knew not what it was to be "without bakemeat in the house" where their

Tables dorment in the hall alway
Stood ready coveted all the longe day.

The English mariners were plying a good trade. Like the Shipman in Chaucer, they

> Knew wel alle the havenes, as they were
> From Gootlond, to the Cape of Finistere.
> And every cryk in Britayne and in Spayne.

As England was becoming commercially important, and the new merchant class in the towns grew richer, their voices were listened to in the affairs of the nation. The Merchant represents this new rising class, though Chaucer closes the description with a fashionable sneer.

> Forsooth, he was worthy man withal :
> But, truly, I wot not how men him call.

The importance and self-consciousness of the smaller tradesmen and handicraftsmen increased with that of the great merchants. The middle class was learing to hold up its head, collectively and individually. The historical origin of the Host, the actual Master Harry Bailly, vinter and landlord of the Tabard Inn in Southwark, was likewise a member of Parliament, and very probably felt as sure of himself in real life as the mimic personage bearing his name in its fictitious reproduction. And he and his fellows began to look upon themselves, and be looked upon, as a power in the State. In the *Canterbury Tales*, though the Knight is still, of course, the most respected figure in such company, and he brings in the book a pale afterglow of the crusades, but the Host now treads close upon his heels, big with the importance of a prosperous citizen who has twice sat in Parliament side by side with the knights of the shire.

In the fourteenth century the English State had ceased to be the feudal monarchy of the crude days of William the Conqueror and his successors. In the great French wars of Edward III the main body of the force had been made up of Englishmen serving for pay, and armed with their national implement, the bow, such as Yeomen carried with him on the ride to Canterbury :

A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen
Under his belt he dare full thriftily.
Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly.
His arrows drooped not with feathers low,
And in his hand he bare mighty bow.

The lower classes in English society were also raising their heads and protesting against injustice as exhibited in the Peasants' Revolt. They were, naturally, not liked by the upper classes. In his *Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer refers to the "stormy people", their levity, untruthfulness, indiscretion fickleness, and garrulity, and the folly of putting any trust in them. In his *Nun's Priest's Tale* he makes a direct reference to the Peasants' Revolt :

So hideous was the noise, ah bencite !
That of a truth Jack Straw, and his meinie
Not made never shoutes half so shrill,
When that they any Fleming meant kill.

There were still some conservative workmen who believed in living a peaceful life, and paying due respect to the authorities. The Ploughman represents such a class of true labourers, good, religious and charitable in life and always ready to pay their taxes.

Though by the middle of the fourteenth centuary English had become, or was just becoming, the common tongue of the whole nation, and Parliament was opened by an English Speech in the year 1363, yet it still seems to have continued the pedantic affection of a profession for its members, like Chaucer's *Man of Law*, to introduce French law-terms into common conversation ; so that it is natural enough to find the Sumnour following suit, and interlacing his tale with Latin scraps picked up by him from the decrees and pleadings of the ecclesiastical courts.

The extravagance in dress was prevalent in this period. When the kinds of clothing respectively worn by the different classes served as distinctions of rank, the display of

splendour in one class could hardly fail to provoke emulation in the others. This love of display is shown in several characters of *Canterbury Tales*. The knight's horses are decked out with more finery, than are the knights themselves, with "curious harness, as in saddles and bridles, cruppers, and breastplates, covered with precious clothing, and with bars and plates of gold and silver". The Wife of Bath makes the most of her opportunities to be seen as well as to see. Her "kerchiefs" were "full fine" of texture, and weighed, one might be sworn, ten pounds.

> That on Sunday were upon her head—
> Her hosen too were of fine scarlet red,
> Full staighty-tied, and shoes full moist and new
> ....
> Upon an ambler easily she sat,
> Y-wimpled well, and on her head a hat,
> As broad as is a buchlar or a targe.

Of all those characters fond of show, the youthful Squire is the most showy :

> Embroidered was he, as it were a mead
> All full of freshest flowers, white and red.

In the fourteenth century before the beginning of the Reformation, there were already signs of scepticism. The old harmony between dogma and intelligence had ceased to exist. People were beginning to have opinions of their own and their attitude to the clergy was no longer of reverence and devotion, but of ridicule and censure. This was also, to a great extent, due to the corruption and laxity of discipline which had crept into the scholastic order. We hear an echo of this new attitude in the sketches of priest, monks etc., as given in the *Canterbury Tales*. The picture is not a flattering one. The monastic order had forgotten their primitive rule of poverty and labour. From many of their monasteries, and from the inmates who dwelt in these comfortable halls, had vanished even all pretence of disguise. The Monk paid no attention to the rule of St. Benedict, and of disciple St. Maur

> Because that it was old and somewhat strait

and preferred to fall in with the notions of latter times. He was a fat, highly-fed individual, whose sole idea was hunting. He could not understand why he should study books and unhinge his mind by the effort; life was not worth having at the price. The Friar was a clever and prosperous beggar, who used his gift of fine language to ensure himself a merry life. The Prioress was a pleasant, tender-hearted, but rather affected person, who cared more about fine manners than about austerity; her chaplain was a lusty fellow who told broad stories with zest. The Pardoner represented a cynical class of exploiters with doubtful qualification, who earned great profits on account of the ignorance and superstitions of the poorer people.

Those who administered religion officially, like the Bishops etc., were no better. They lived a life of luxury, and exploited the ignorant folk. The repulsive Somnour sold the powers conferred on him by the ecclesiastical courts, sacrificing poor wretches and unwary lovers. The Canon, who met the pilgrims on the way had lost all sense of spiritual duties. He was in search of the Philosophers's stone, and was always anxious to extort money from the credulous in order to purse his own foolish researches.

Though most of the clergy were degenerates and parasites, there were some still, especially of a lower status, like the good village Parson, who were doing their duties faithfully. But as most of them had fallen from their high order, the attitude of the people towards their long sermons was one of disgust and ridicule. Thus when the Reve in his tale also starts "sermoning," the Host stops him :

> What availeth all this wit ?
> What ? should we speak all day of Holy writ ?
> The devil surely made a reeve to preach.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q. What are the chief features of the Age of Chaucer ?

Ans. The Age of Chaucer is one of the most active, complicated, vexed and entangled transitional periods in the history of England. This Age was a meeting ground of the two divergent and incongruous periods—the old and the new, the medieval and the Renaissance. The leaven of the Renaissance, of the modern spirit. was discernible on the horizon but the Medieval Age by no means had completely passed away. The Medieval and the Renaissance stood side by side. The distinctive feature of the Medieval mind is its belief in spirituality and abstract ideas, whereas the Renaissance lays emphasis on the sensuous and the concrete. In the attitude towards society the Medieval mind supports communism; the Renaissance prefers individualism. The Medieval mind does not tolerate free thought, speculation and reason. "The right of private judgment, which lies at the very foundation of Protestantism, is nothing but a corollary of the individualism of the Renaissance".

The fourteenth century is a period of great political, social, religious and literary activity. Politically it was a period of the Hundred Years' War which released and strengthened the feelings of national consciousness and patriotism both in England and France. People began to realise that they were Englishmen or Frenchmen and the idea of a Holy Empire evaporated from their thoughts. The victory at the battle of Crecy (1346) and of Poitiers (1356) made Englishmen fervent patriots. As these crucial battles were largely won by the English yeomen, middle class

sprang up to ascendancy. They gradually grabbed power from the hands of the nobility. Power like a slipper eel slipped from the hands of the nobility. The English Parliament, democratic to the very core, came into prominence. The position of the King was not better than a doll or a puppet. He was reduced to a doleful condition. He was like a bird whose wings were clipped off. He was not the ruler but he was ruled by his subjects. He did not dictate but he was dictated by the Parliament. No new taxes were levied and imposed without the consent of the Parliament; no new policy could be formulated without the acquiescence of the Parliament. The Parliament was all in all. Jusserand says, "From the end of the 14th century an English man could already say, as he does to-day, "My business is not the business of the state, but the business of the state is my business".

The democratic tendency spread like wild fire in every walk of life. As the trade and commerce expanded and the new towns sprang up, the middle class became a repository and a store-house of power and pelf which hastened the decline of the old Feudal system. Now a dissatisfied and discontented serf could become a freeman by establishing a legal residence in one of the towns. The great Plague in 1348 which caused disaster, panic and a heavy loss of human beings, exerted and weilded a tremendous influence in exempting labouring classes from the bonds of serfdom. As the Plague effaced half the population from the surface of England, it aggravated the peasant problem by reducing the supply of labour. The demand for the products was also reduced to half. "The price of labour rose, the price of bread fell". The attempts which were directed to control soaring wages of labour by legislation proved of no avail. The simply added fuel to the fire; they merely fanned the flame of irritation of the labourers which terribly exploded like a valcano in the bloody peasants' revolt of 1381. This seething social strife was principally due to the contrast between luxury and poverty, between idle rich people rolling in wealth and the overtaxed peasantry

grovelling in the mire of poverty. "This revolt, suppressed by the courage and good judgment of the boy King, Richard II, though barren of any direct and immediate results, exerted a lasting influence on the temper of the lower classes, fostering in them a spirit of independence which made them no longer a negligible quantity in the life of the nation".* This social discontent found expression in the Peasants' Revolt led by John Ball, whose saying—"when Adam delved and Eve span who was then the gentleman" was the motto of a kind of socialism.

The Age of Chaucer witnessed a rapid growth in trade and commerce. The English People shed off their insularity and became travellers returning with wider interests and a larger horizon. England became commercially important. Small traders and handicrafts grew into power and began to behave like aldermen and well-to-do citizens. In the *Prologue* Chaucer says about the members of a guild.

> "*Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys*
> *To sitten in a yeldhalle on a days.*
> *Everich, for the wisdon that he can,*
> *Was shaply for to been an alderman.*"

Women were thought inferior to men. Women of lower strata of society were hard worked and doomed to a life of unrelieved drudgery. Most of them were illiterate. The ladies of higher society displayed an excess of delicacy and decorum. The court ladies showed false pity and sentimentality. Woman of the upper strata enjoyed pelf and power only by marriage. The only alternative to marriage was a nunnery. To the churchman women were the source of all evil; to the courtly poets and romantic squires, they were adorable creatures. Chaucer's Squire belongs to the second category—

> "*And born him wel, as of so litel space*
> *In hope to stoden in his lady grace.*"

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*R. K. Root : Chaucer.

Child marriage was in vogue among the rich and wealthy persons. Richard II himself married the child daughter of the King of France. Dowry was in practice and girls were sometimes sold.

In the domain of religion, England broke her relations with the Papacy. As the seat of Papacy was removed from Rome to Avignon and the Pope supported the French, "loyalty to the Pope came into conflict with hatred of and the new sentiment of national patriotism proved the France, stronger." Other incidents also hastened the irritation of the English. The Papacy had become a stronghold of profligacy, vices and corruption. As the foreigners, French and Italian, deputed by the Pope to the richest clerical post in England, spent their income abroad, the national pride was stimulated. When a French Pope, as the last court of appeal in matters of the canons of law, poked his nose in judgments of English courts, it fanned the flame of national hatred and animosity. This anti-papal agitaion, though purely political in character, could not fail to shake also the religious authority of the church. In 1378 Europe saw two rival Popes, each casting slur upon the other. England supported Urban VI, the Pope of Room, while France conseted to Clement VII of Avignon.

The direct result of this schism was a crushing blow upon the sanctity of the Papal authority. It weakned the Papacy Corruption in the church took the place of discipline. The greater prelates heaped up wealth; and lived in a godless and wordly way, the rank and file of the clergy were ignorant and careless, the mendicant friars were notorious for their greed and profligacy. "In this spiritual desert it was natural that there should appear prophets, whether we call them fanatics or reformers; and to some extent at least they were supported by a general discontent".* Wycliffe 'the morning star of the Reformation' launched Lollard's movement to eradicate evils from the

*G. K. Chesterton : Chaucer.

church. Poets like Chaucer, Langland and Gower presented naked deplorable condition of the Papacy and its members. "Chaucer's Prologue shows a world in which avarice and deceit are all but universal." Chaucer's Monk is a worldy person who had deserted his ecclesiastical services. Chaucer's Friar is 'a wanton and merry fellow'.

"He knew the taverns wel in every town
And everich hostiler and tappestere."

As for the literary activities, the Age of Chaucer witnessed the rise of the English language. The English language was standardised and the East Midland dialect became the language of London and the Universities. The other dialects—Southern, Northumbrian and Kentish—rapidly melted away from literature. It was the work of Chaucer who made the dialect of London the standard for future writers and the parent of current modern English. *The Canterbury Tales* is a landmark in the history of English well as in the English language.

The era witnessed the foundation of an English Prose style. "Earlier specimens have been experimental or purely imitative, now, in the works of Mandeville and Malory, we have prose that is both original and individual. The English tongue is now ripe for a prose style".*

The age of anonymity, when authors did not give out their names passed away and the authors of the age of Chaucer were in favour of revealing their identity. The greater number of books of this period can definitely be ascribed.

Inspite of a throng of lesser writers, the Age saw five outstanding and prominent literary figures. There is the anonymous author of '*Sir Gawayne and the Pearl*'. There is Langland, Gower, Wycliffe and above all Chaucer. Wycliffe,

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*E. A. Albert : A. History of English Literature.

the translator of the Bible, was a versatile and vigorous prose writer. Prose writers like Wycliffe, Mandeville and Malory developed a prose style. In the department of poetry Chaucer, Langland and Gower rendered incalculable and meritorious service. The main literary forms developed in poetry were the rise of allegory, the development of the ballad, descriptive and narrative poems and the metrical romances. New metres like Rhyme Royal, Ottava Rima and Heroic Couplet came into fashion.

The age of Chaucer is a period of great activity in all walks of life. The Age resembles not a stagnant pool but a flowing river. This Age with all its vexed and troubled problems approximates the Modern Age. Kittredge calls the period "a singularly modern time." R. K. Root in his book '*The Poetry of Chaucer*' has beautifully summed up the chief traits of the Age in the following words :—

"But if the world of fourteenth century England was sadly out of joint, it was far from being stagnant. In its intellectual ferment the age had much the same character as the age of great Elizabeth. There was the same glow of patriotism and national consciousness consequent upon a series of brilliant victories against a foreign foe ; there was the same spirit of revolt against a foreign church, and, though the forms of mediaevalism still survived, there was at work the same leaven of new ideas and of a new conception of life, reinforced by a new interest in the works of classical antiquity, coming over-seas from Italy : literature and art was breaking away from the conventional, and under the influence of new models, was drinking again at the fountain-head of nature. For such periods of restlessness and change have often given birth to great creative literature".

Q. "Chaucer stands in much the same relation to the life of his time as Pope does to the earlier phases of the XVIII century and Tennyson to the Victorian Era." Discuss

Or

Write a note on Chaucer's Realism.

Or

Discuss the Prologue as a picture of contemporary society.

Ans. Literature reflects the tendencies of the age in which it is produced, and there is always a supreme literary artist who becomes the mouthpiece of his age, and gives expresssion to its hopes aspirations, its fads and and fetishes, its fears and doubts, its prosperity and enterprise in his works. Such an artist was Alexander Pope in the XVIII century, the age of Classicism, and such a poet was Alfred Tennyson in the Victorian Age, during the 19th Century. Pope faithfully represented his age, its social and literary tendencies in the poems such as *The Rape of the Lock*, *Dunciad*, *Essay on Man* and *Essay on Criticism.* In the *Rape of the Lock* the poet directs his attention to the fashions and amours of the ladies of fashion represented by Arabella Fermor, and to the foppishness and gay frivolities of the Courtiers and men of social disposition. In the '*Essay on Man*', Pope gives expression to the philosophical thought of his age, as had been propounded, by Bolingbroke. 'The proper study of mankind is man,' and it is no use delving deep into the mysteries of creation and the works of the Divine Being. Pope writes for the materialistic people of his times to whome the mysticism of Blake and the subtleties of Berkly were incomprehensible things. In the *Dunciad* Pope lets loose the floodgates of scurrilous satire presenting the political strife of the times and the low moral standards to which the wits had fallen in those days.

Like Pope, Tennyson was equally the mouthpiece of the Victorian society, and represented the ideals, traditions, hopes and aspirations of the people. He reflected the fancies and sentiments of Victorian England. To quote Long, "For nearly half a century Tennyson was not only a man and a poet, he was a voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody, their doubts and their faith, their griefs and their triumphs''. In the *Princess* the poet undertook to grapple with one of the rising questions of the day—that of the higher education of women and their place in the fast changing conditions of society. His *Locksley Hall* of (1842) is full of the restless spirit of 'Young England' and of its faith in Science, Commerce and the progress of mankind; while its sequel, *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* (1886) shows the revulsion of feeling which had occured in many minds when the rapid development of Science seemed to threaten the very foundations of religion, and Commerce was filling the world with the sordid greed of gain. In the *Palace of Art* the poet describes and condemns the spirit of aestheticism and Pre-Raphaliticism, whose sole religion was the worship of Beauty and Knowledge for their own sake. *Maud*, "gives a dramatic rendering of the revolt of a cultured mind against the hypocrisy and corruptions of a society degraded by the worship of Mammon." His *Idylles of the King* reveals another deep conviction of his age—"the spreading mischief of a moral taint." In *Memoriam* the poet traces the triumph of Faith and Love over Death and Scepticism. In all these ways Tennyson represents the Victorian Age.

Like Pope and Tennyson Chaucer too represents his own age and holds the mirror upto the life of his time. He is as truly the social chronicler of England in the late 14th century as Froissart is the political and military chronicler of France during the same period. His poetry reflects the fourteenth century not in fragments but as a complete whole. Other poets of his age direct their gaze and attention to only certain limited aspect of the time. For example, the unknown author of *Pearl* shows us the

mysticism of refined mind; *Wyclif*, the surging wave of religious reformation; *Gower* the fear produced in the wealthier class by the Peasant Rising; *Barbour* the break between the literature of Scotland and of England and the advent of patriotic Scottish poetry; and *Langland* the corruption in the Church and the religious order. Each of these authors throws light only on one aspect of fourteenty century life. It is Chaucer's greatness that he directs his comprehensive gaze not on one aspect *only* of his times, but on all its wide and variegated life. His is the wide and capacious soul and he takes a fuller view of his times more than anyone else could have taken in those days.

Chaucer symbolises the Middle Ages, and his world is medieval. But beneath the medievalism the leaven of the Renaissances is already at work, and the poet stands at the dividing of ways, linking himself with the old world of medievalism that was passing away, and heralding the birth of the new age that was peeping at the horizen. Let us now examine how Chaucer *realistically* portrays his age in all its varied aspects.

Realism.

At the outset it must be made clear that Chaucer at heart was a realist, and he revealed the truth about life as he saw it. Before him, the writers were lost in the world of dreams and allegories. In his French Period, Chaucer too was an allegorist, but in the English period he shook off the shackles of the dreamy allegory and came out with healthy observations about the life that he found unfolding before his eyes. He had the innate instinct to catch within his perview the soul of his generation in all its fullness and its depth. He had the seeing eye, the retentive memory, the judgment to select, and the capacity to expound. Thus his observations about his times are true and realistic and not set forth with the vision of a dream allegorist.

Chivalry.

Chaucer's poetry reflects the chivalric spirit of the medieval times. The fourteenth century was still in the fascinating hold of chivalry and knighthood. In the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer reflects the fading chivalry of the middle ages represented in the person of the *Knight*, and the rising chivalry of his own times reflected in his son, a young *Squire*. The old Knight was a brave warrior, and like many chivalrous Knights of the middle ages, had signalised his chivalric career by fighting in fifteen mortal battles, all for the defence of religion. He was the true symbole of the old world of knighthood that was passing away giving place to a new conception of chivalry represented by his son the young Squire, who inspite of his military exploits, was a man of happy go lucky nature. The young Squire was hardly as sober, sedate and prudent as was his father, the embodiment of the old world of chivalry. He was a Knight of revelry, representing another kind of chivalry, the more luxurious and less idealistic temper of the age of great French war. All the day he was not lost in dreams of warfare like the Knights of old, but he took delight in singing and playing upon the flute.

> "*Well could he sit a horse and ride,*
> *Make songs, joust and dance, draw and write.*"

Political Conditions of the Times.

In his Tales, Chaucer realistically presented the political conditions of his times. He referred to the *Peasants' Revolt*,—where in bands of peasant armed with weapons turned out from villages, plundering, looting, burning, killing the aristocracy of the age,—in the Clerk's Tale and in the Nun Priest's, Tale. In the Clerk's Tale, he referred to the 'stormy people,' their levity, their untruthfulness, their indiscretion and fickleness, their garrulity and their foolishness, and he frankly gave his opinion that it was an act of great folly to have any trust in them. In the *Nun's Priest's Tale* Chaucer says—

"So hideous was the noise, ah Bencite !
That of a truth Jack Straw, and his meine
Not made never shoutes half so shrill,
When that they any Fleming meant to kill."

Chaucer had no love and liking for the rabblement and hence in his works we have few references to these popular movements of the people out for grabbing power from the nobility. In this connection William Vaughan Moody well observes, "The peasant rebellion and the Lollard agitation give us glimpses of an England which Chaucer, inspite of the many sidedness of his work, did not reveal. *The Canterbury Tales* contain few references to the plague, only one to the peasant uprising, and only one to Lollardry, and these references are casual of jesting. *Chaucer wrote for the Court and cultivated classes, to whom the sufferings of the poor were a matter of the utmost indifference*". In Chaucer's presentation of the Carpenter, Dyer, Tapycer, Haberdasshere, we meet the new power that these Commoners were getting or grabbing at this time. They were all clad alike and each of them seemed a fair 'burgeys,'

"To sitten in a yelde halle on a days."

Trade and Commerce.

The fourteenth century in England witnessed the rise of the rich and prosperous merchants and tradesmen. They carried splendid business with European countries and were laying the foundation of England's industrial prosperity. Small traders and handicraftsmen grew into power and began to behave like aldermen and well-to-do citizens. Chaucer makes reference to the rise of traders and merchants during his times, and his *Merchant* is the type of the merchants that were gradually coming into prominence. The picture of the average merchant has a familiar ring about it :

"A Merchant was ther with a forked beard,
In motteleye and hye on horse he sat
Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat ;
His bootes clasped faire and fetisly."

Medical Profession.

In Chaucer's Doctor of Physic, we have an excellent picture of the mediaeval medicine man, with his herbal remedies and his knowledge of astronomy—or what we should call astrology. In common with the physicians of the day, he was a priest, but Chaucer indicates that his medical studies had drawn him away from his profession : "*His studie was but litel on the Bible.*" Chaucer gives a sly dig at him for his fee-loving propensities :

> "*For gold in physick is a cordial*
> *Therefore he lovede gold in special.*"

The supposed medicinal value of the metal, so common not only in the Middle Ages but a century or so later, is here touched upon.

Religious Conditions.

Chaucer refers to the religious conditions of his times by creating the ecclesiastical characters in the *Prologue*. He does not pointedly strike at the corruption among the clergymen of the times like Langland, but he certainly presents realistically the fatty degeneration that had set in religious life of the times. The clergymen instead of devoting their time and energy to religious meditation and genuine redemption of fallen souls had given themselves up wantonly to profligacy, and epicuranism. Chaucer does not attack like Wyclif or Lollard any principle or dogma of Christian Catholicism, but certainly he cannot tolerate the growing corruption, laxity of discipline and love of luxury prevailing among the clergy. He, therefore, satirises these depraved and fallen ecclesiastics of his times. The picture of the Clergy as presented by Chaucer is not at all encouraging. The monks had forgotton their original rule of poverty and labour. Chaucer's *Monk* is a fat well-fed individual, who is more interested in hunting than in the performance of his religious duties. Other ecclesiastics are

hangers on and caterpillars of the Church. The *Friar* is a depraved fellow for he knows all the town taverns, and every inn-keeper and bar-maid better than the lepers and beggar-women. It does not accord with a man of his importance to have acquaintance with sick lepers, for he has all his acquaintance with sick folk and sellers of victual. The *Franklin* is still worse. He is a pleasure seeker and revels in drinking and fine eating. The Sumner, the Pardoner are traders in religion selling religious pardon to those who seek their blessing for money. Chaucer presents these religious figures of his times in their true colours and thereby he realistically provides a peep into the religious conditions of his age. Chaucer gives his ideal of a true and saintly clergyman in the figure of the *Parson*, who should have served as the *beau ideal* to his other brother clergymen. The Parson is a learned man faithfully preaching Christ's gospel and devoutly instructing his parishioners He is holy and virtuous. He is meek and polite. He is no hireling but a shepherd.

Table Manners.

Chaucer also reveals the conditions of the inns of his times and the table manners of the pilgrims. We gather from Chaucer that inns were situated at some distances and beer was also found in other places than in these inns. There is also a disquisition on table manners of the age in the *Prologue.* Each guest brought his own knife, but for common use there were no forks. At the beginning and end of dinner everyone washed his hands—an obviously desirable proceeding.

Condition of Women.

Chaucer throws light on the condition of women of his times in the *Prologue* as well as in the *Tales*. Chaucer's tales with the exception of one or two contain bitter attacks on women in keeping with the conventional attitude of women towards this sex. In the *Nun's Priest's Tale,*

Chaucer points out that a husband who follows the advice of his wife will come to grief. In the *Prologue* Chaucer has presented three ladies. The Prioress, a Nun and the Wife of Bath. These ladies are quite representatives of the Women of his times.

The Spirit of New Learning.

Though the character of the *Clerk* of Oxford Chaucer has presented the interest that people of this age began to take in classical writers The new learning began to be popular at this time, as can be seen in the case of the *Clerk* of Oxford.

"For him was levere at his beddes head.
Twenty books, clad in black or red.
Of Aristotle and his philosophy.
Than robes rich or filthe or gay sautrye."

Conclusion.

In all these ways it can be unhesitatingly said that Chaucer is the chronicler of his age and he reflects his century not in fragments but completely. He heralds the birth of the new humanism and the dawn of the Renaissance, and at the same time he vividly brings before us the traditions and conventions which his age had inherited from the Middle Ages.

Q. Write a note on Chaucer's art of Characterisation. Discuss and illustrate the artistic method adopted by Chaucer in the portrayal of his pilgrims.

Or

Show that Chaucer's pilgrims are at once types and individuals, true of their own age representatives of humanity in general.

Or

"Chaucer has made his group of pilgrims into a picture of his time, the like of which is not to be found elsewhere." Discuss.

Ans. Chaucer is the first great painter of character in English Literature. In fact, next to Shakespeare, he is the greatest in this field. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer takes to the study of contemporary English society and turns poetry with tolerant curiosity to the study of men and manners. In the *Prologue* he introduces thirty pilgrims representing all types and shades of fourteenth century society except the highest (peers) and the lowest—the two extremes unlikely to meet in the concourse. "He is the pioneer of the group of spectators who regard with amused indulgence the web and woof variously coloured threads, which is the chequered stuff of a society." Before the *Canterbury Tales*, we do not find a poem of which the first object is to show the truthful spectacle of life at its average. By presenting pilgrims drawn from different classes of society ranging from the knightly class to the order of the clergymen, Chaucer presents the four-teenth century life as vividly and clearly as Tennyson did later in the Victorian age. Chaucer's characters form a picture gallery of the fourteenth century. He presents each of his thirty pilgrims with minnute details about their dress, physical features, habits, peculiar manners and idiosyncracies of character. In the group of the pilgrims that set out for the holy pilgrimage to Canterbury, we have a Kinght, a Squire, a Yeomen, a Prioress, a Monk, a Friar, Merchant, an Oxford Clerk, a Sergeant of the Law, a Franklin, a Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer, a Ship man, a Cook, a Doctor of Physic, a Goodwife from Bath, a Parson, a Ploughman, a Reeve, a Miller, a Sumner, a Pardoner, a Maniciple. All these characters have been portrayed by Chaucer with the skill of a dramatist and a novelist and each picture that he has drawn stands for a full portrait, individualistic and yet standing for a type. The 14th century society comes in its full form in these characters.

Chaucer adopts the method of an artist and a portrait painter in the portrayal of his characters. He looks at his characters objectively with intellect, detachment and penetration. He describes his characters as if his eye were

wandering over them, noticing a bright detail here and there. This very impression of casualness, this economy, significance and variety of every detail are examples of that art which conceals art. His method in the painting of characters is primitive, such as no artist would adopt to-day. Like the primitive artist, he is a little clumsy, stiff in contours, is fond of bright colours and presents details which make us smile for a time. Details in the portraits follow haphazardly. No definite pattern of description is followed. Every character emerges step by step, through a succession of concerte details which fall in the end into perspective and reveal the person. Sometimes details of dress come first and from them we infer the character. Sometimes he begins with the character and adds touches of dress afterwards. Such casualness and delightful negligence increase the impression of truthfulness.

It is said that, "Chaucer's characters are individuals as well as types, not mere phantoms of the brain but real human beings and types true to the likeness of whole classes of men and women"* Chaucer's great art lies in his striking the delicate balance between the individual and the type. We behold not only the individual but also the type. The abstract type is made visible and real as embodied in the individual. "They are timeless creations on a time-determined stage." "Every age in Canterbury pilgrimage is the pilgrimage of the word and the pilgrims, the epitome of mankind." "Of Chaucer's characters as depicted in the Prologue, some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves for ever remain unaltered ; and consequently they are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal life beyond which never does Nature sted. Names alter, things never alter. They are true to all generations."

Each of the thirty characters drawn by Chaucer stands for the type ; but each character stands as an individual

*A. C. Ward : Chaucer.

well marked in all personal details. The old *Knight* is a chivalrous character of all ages, loving faithfulness, liberality and courtesy. He stands for heroism and manliness that a good knight would always show on the battlefield. But he has been individualised by his prudence and his weakness of behaviour, as well as by his jerkin of fustian all begrimed, by his coat of mail and the good horse on which he rode. His son, the young *Squire*, stands for the type of a merry happy-go-lucky youth interested in singing and playing upon the flute. He has been individualised by his curly locks, his embroidered clothes, his short coat with long wide sleeves. The *Yeoman* is the type of those who are well-versed in archery ; but he has been give an individualistic colour by his cropped head and his brown visage, his sword, buckler and dagger. The *Prioress* is the type of a woman who is an epicure, but she is portrayed as an individual, with her meticulous care in eating, and her courtly manners as well as her tenderness of heart. The *Monk* is the type of monks those times interested not in religion and the study of holy books, but in riding on horses and keeping greyhounds for hunting. But Chaucer's Monk is an individual with bald head and rolling eyes glowing like for fire under a cauldron. The *Friar* represents the friars of Chaucer's times. He stands for the type of the friars of the 14th century. He is the type of those frairs who were not at all interested in the performance of their religious rites and duties and helping the poor, but in taking money from all classes of people as gifts. Like Chaucer's Friar, the friars of those days were wanton and jolly, interested in gay and flattering talk. They were amorous and married off many a young woman. But Chaucer's Friar is individualised by his Pleasant voice and his skill in singing ballads, as well as his knowledge of town-taverns and barmaids. He has been given a name (Hubert) to make him more like a true person rather than an abstraction. The *Merchant* is the type of tradesmen of those times who knew how to make profit and safeguard their business interest. But Chaucer's Merchant is an individual figure extremely witty and clever in bargaining and borrowing. He sits on

a horse with a beaver-hat on his head, and boots fastened neatly with rich clasps. The *Oxford Clerk* is the type of good scholars, not interested in worldly glory, but in the advancement of knowledge and learning. But Chaucer's Oxford Clerk comes as a figure of individual learning with his volumes of Aristotle and his hollow-cheeks, grave looks, and his threadbare cloak. The *Franklin* again is a typical figure joining hands with the monks and friars of those times. He is a pleasure seeker for he is the son of Epicture, interested in wine and woman, meat and drink. Even this Franklin has been individualised by his dagger hung at his girdle and a pouch of taffeta white as morning's milk. The *Man of Law* is a typical lawyer and so is the *Doctor of Physic* interested in gold—'*for gold in physic is a cordial, and therefore he loved gold in special.*' Yet these figures are individualised by their peculiar traits and physical features The *Shipman*, a typical sailor of the times, is again individualised by the expression, '*with many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.*' There are other characters in the *Prologue* such as the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, the Cook, the Maniciple, the Ploughman who are representatives of the various types of contemporary society. They are no longer mere dummies or types. Their idiosyncracies, their arguments, their likes and dislikes, and their habiliments make them as individual figures; living people like ourselves. These portraits strike the delicate balance between character in the technical sense of the word and the living individual —a balance which preserves at once the typical qualities of the one and the human idiosyncrasies of the other. Referring to this art of Chaucer Legouis says, "More general traits would have turned the picture into a frozen symbol, an uninteresting abstraction ; more individual traits would have confused it by depriving the mind of obvious means of identification." Chaucer's characters, men and women, in the *Prologue*, 'stop before us just long enough to enable us to form an idea of their personality."

Chaucer exhibits the vivid power of describing his characters in their full details—by apt comparisons. He

brings before our mind's eye the full portrait of the character drawn by him. The Young Squire has been described as a merry youth of playful disposition in a single line—'*He was as fresh as is the month of May,*' and so is the Friar presented with—

> "*His eyes twynkled in his heed aryght*
> *As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.*"

Chaucer succeeds in vivid presentation of his characters because of his unerring observation. He has the seeing eye, the retentive memory, the judgment to select and the capacity to expound. His keen observation of the minutest details of his characters, their dresses, their looks, their manners, enables him to present his characters in full, that they appear as life-like characters and not mere bloodless abstractions.

Chaucer knows the art of differentiating his characters cleverly by presenting them as foils to the other. The Miller and the Reeve, the Summoner and the Friar, the Cook and the Mençiple, the Prioress and the Wife of Bath are good foils. Referring to this power of portraying character *well differentiated from each other*, Dryden observes in the *Preface to the Fables*, "All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations but also in their physiognomies and persons. Baptisa Porta could not have described their natures better than by the marks the poet gives them. The matter and manners of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humours and callings, that each of them would be unproper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity, their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling and their breeding, such as are becoming of them and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious and some virtuous, some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different. The Reeve,

the Miller, and the Cook are several men, and distinguished from each other as the mincing Lady Prioress and the broad speaking gap-toothed Wife of Bath. 'Tis sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty."

Chaucher's characters are so real that they can be easily recognised. The Wife of Bath whose name slips out as Alison, and the Oxford Clerk named Jankyn, are figures drawn from Chaucer's personal acquaintance. As such they can be identified with real figures and hence comes the reality of their portraits.

Chaucer's art of characterisation is free from personal bias or animosity. He portrays character objectively, impartially and disinterestedly without betraying his animosity against any one of them. He is akin to Shakespeare and Fielding in this respect. His broad humanity and wide sympathy is for all the characters he has drawn. Legouis rightly says, "Of all writers of genius, Chaucer is the one with whom it is easiest to have a sense of comradeship." Chaucer takes interest in all his characters. He is not repelled by their foibles, but shares their feelings, becoming one with them for the time being. In fine, "Chaucer is content to picture a world in which the rain falleth alike upon the just and the unjust, and in which the latter seem to have a liberal share of the umbrellas He enjoys it all, and describes its inhabitants as they are, not as he thinks they out to be. The reader may think that this or that character deserves to come to a bad end, but not so Chaucer, who regards them all as kindly, as impersonally as Nature herself."

Chaucer is a liberal comedian. Chaucer's genius like Shakespeare's is to depict the various types of humorous characters. His earlier characters may be personifications or allegorical figures, but the characters of the *Prologue* are all lively, and with a deft touch, Chaucer particularly draws out the humorous traits of the Prioress, the Monk, the Wife of Bath, the Franklyn and the Doctor of Physic. He

takes pleasure in pinpointing the humorous traits of his characters. As Lowes says, "Long before Balzac, Chaucer conceived and exhibited the Human Comedy."

Chaucer's characters except the Friar and the Franklyn are generally not romantic. The poet delights in presenting plain men and women interested in the normal course of livining.

Chaucer reveals his characters by their colours, dresses and appearances. Thus the Knight's 'bismotered haber geoun,' is an indication of his activity, and the Shipman's 'sunburnt skin' of his sea faring life.

Sometimes the character is revealed to us through the thoughts and actions of the men and women. The gentility of the Knight is revealed by his soothing words to other pilgrims. The railing of the Miller and the Reeve reflects their characters, and the quarrels of the Friar and the Summoner bring them out in their true colours.

"There is an open air atmosphere about his characters. His people are always on the move Never do they become shadowy or lifeless. They shout and swear, and laugh and weep, interrupt the story teller, pass compliments, and in general behave themselves as we might expect them to be in the dramatic circumstance of the narrative."*

Chaucer's art of characterisation is much like a novelist and a dramatist and he anticipates both Fielding and Shakespeare - masters of character portrayal—in his *Canterbury Tales.* [Agra 1960]

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*Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

Q Write a note on Chaucer as a Narrative poet. What are the qualities which made Chaucer the supreme narrative poet in English ?

Or

'Chaucer is one of the world's three or four story tellers'. (Lowell) . Discuss.

Ans. Chaucer is rightly regarded as the supreme narrative poet of his country, and his 'Canterbury Tales' is a standing monument of his genius as a narrator in verse. Other writers have greater monuments, but nobody has Chaucer's excellence of narration in verse. "Chaucer is one of the world's three or four story tellers', says Lowell. "Chaucer is known to everybody as the prince of story-tellers, as incomparably the greatest of our narrative poets. Indeed, if we disregard the epic, which stands in a class by itself, I do not see why we should hesitate to call him the greatest of all narrative poets whatsoever making no reservation of era or of language." Chaucer was inspired in his art of narration by the example of the Middle Ages wherein story telling was an art, and a true poet was regarded to be a story teller or a trouvere. In the good old days it was believed that a perfect story should be full of action and should have truth as its basis. It should be an artistic work with unity running through the various threads of the story. Chaucer had before him this noble conception of a story. and he had the guidance of Boccaccio's *Decameron* in his venture as a teller of tales in the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer knew that the *Decameron* was not a perfect work since there was practically no movement and variety in the action of the stories and they were mostly mechanical and monotonous in character. Chaucer set about his task with an advantage, for all that he had to do was to avoid the pitfalls of Boccaccio, and strike new lines in story telling, by basing his stories on a straightforward and direct course with minimum of description and moralising, so that the reader's attention could be caught in the narration of the tale.

Like Shakespeare, Chaucer rarely took the trouble of inventing a plot for his stories. His tales have no originality of plot. He borrowed his plots from Latin, French and Italian sources. But Chaucer never concealed his source as Shakespeare did. He borrowed his plot but his style was his own. By the alembic of his genius he changed the dross into gold. He poured old wine in new bottle but the bottle was his own. In this sense both Root and Chesterton regard Chaucer an original poet.

Chaucer had originally planned to narrate a number of tales, but all that he has left behind are twenty four tales differing in character like the characters who narrate them. These tales can be divided according to their subject matter. Of the twenty four tales some are romantic tales, some are fabliaux and some centre round the life of saints. The Knight relates the story of chivalry and war and the Clerk gives the story of Griselda's wifely devotion. The Squire narrates the story of eastern magic. The stories of the Miller and the Reeve are fabliaux. They are tales of contemporary life dealing with lower middle class. *The Pardoner's Tale* is a moral allegory, and the tale of Nun Priestess is an episode in *Reynard the Fox*. Thus of the twenty four tales some are pious and some profane, but each story is in perfect conformity and harmony with the narrator. This gives to the stories their tone of sincerity and truthfulness.

All these tales of Chaucer cannot claim to have any originality. They have been borrowed from various sources, but they are presented in such an artistic manner that they appear to be original pieces of narration. No one, for instance, could deny that the *Pardoner's Tale* is really Chaucer's, though it is of eastern origin and has been told many times.

All the tales of Chaucer have movement and variety. The story moves ahead uninterruptedly and there is a constant progress in the narration. The conduct of story

goes on unabated. The action of the story is not the same. It varies according to the nature of the story. Each story is so artistically narrated that it gives rise to a sequence of fresh tales. The Wife of Bath's views about marriage furnish a quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner and a fresh story starts. Thus the narration does not become tedious and boring. He is always impatient to come to the point once he has made a digression. The easy flow of the narrative or action of the story is not vitally affected as in Spenser's *Faery Queene.*

It does not mean that there are no digressions in Chaucer's narrative art and that every story has an even flow. There are interruptions and digressions. These digressions add philosophical depth to the story. Sir Walter Releigh remarks in this connection. "But first of all he was a great narrative artist, incomparably the greatest of an age, that loved story-telling and knew nothing of the drama. He is a master of all those effects, beyond the scope of the dramatist proper, to be obtained from the apposite intrusion of himself as a narrator, pointing a moral or interposing a reflection, laughing and criticising, expressing incredulity or sympathy".

In this narrative art Chaucer can moralise at places and generalise very unobtrusively. He can be philosophical and didactic. The tales often end on a didactic note. In *Knight's Tale* he comments on human frailty leading to ruin. He guards his readers against moral pitfalls by his acid comments.

In Chaucer's narrative art, there are well marked dramatic touches. He breaks away from the hold of personification and allegory, and becomes a dramatist introducing life and vigour in his narration. He gives new life to an old story and unravels the complexities of sentiment

by his hints as a dramatic observer. The deft touches and the imagination with which he brings up the personality of a character and the sense of humour and pathos make for dramatic elements in his stories. Some of his stories can be easily turned into plays and acted on the stage. An essentially dramatic spirit pervades Chaucer's work.

Chaucer is a great narrator because he infuse humour in his stories and never allows them to become dull and dreary. The humorous touches and porsonal comments at the end of the story make the stories lively and entertaining.

Chaucer's economy of art in narration is seen in his straight forward openings of his tales and in concluding them with an appropriate prayer.

The style is appropriate to each story. It is sometimes grave and dignified, sometimes racy and colloquial, sometimes poetic, sometimes decorative and the climax is carefully worked up. It is generally the language of prose rhymed. Albert has found certain shortcomings and faults in Chaucer's narrative skill. His words are worth quoting. "As a story-teller Chaucer employs somewhat tortuous methods, but his narrative possesses a curious stealthy speed. His stories, viewed strictly as stories, have most of the weaknesses of his generation : a fondness for long speeches, for pedantic digressions on such subjects as dreams and ethical problems, and for long explanations when none are necessary. *Troilus and Criseyde,* heavy with long speeches, is a example of his prolixity, and the *Knight's Tale,* of baffling complexity and over abundant in detail, reveals his haphazard and dawdling methods ; yet both contain many admirable narrative passages. But when he rises above the weaknesses common to the time he is terse, direct and vivacious."

Q. Write a note on Chaucer's Humour and Satire.

Or

"It is safe to say that a great deal of the combination of vivacity in Chaucer's portraits and sketches of all kinds is due to this all pervading humour ; indeed, it is not very likely that any would deny this." (Saintsbury). Discuss.

Ans. Chaucer was a born humorist. He was the master of humour and irony. He was the first true humorist in English literature, and it is by his humour that Chaucer has won a permanent place in the hearts of his readers. Humour was the stuff and substance of his entire mental constitution and the essence of his art. It was the colour of humour that gave the lively touch to his poetry and made it a fountain of liveliness and joy. He was a great master of humour and all his writings abound in it in all its rich variety. He belongs to the race of the great humorists of English literature and is in the company of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais Moliere, Fielding and Dickens. His large hearted and genial humour cuts across the barriers of time and custom, language and idiom and exhilarates us like a tonic as is did the prince and the clown, the clergy and laity of a Feudal Age.

Chaucer's humour is essentially English in character. Lowell gives expression to the English humour of Chaucer in the following words—"Chaucer's is essentially an English humour. It is not the wit of the Frenchman. His humour is born of a strong commonsense and a generous sympathy ; and these are the qualities of the greatest English humorists like Shakespeare and Fielding. He showed the value of the comic point of view—the capacity to expose the incongruity which always lies half-hidden in men and things or in their relations with each other".

What is the secret of Chaucer's appealing humour ? To grasp the secret of Chaucer's humour it is well to

remember that Chaucer with all his wide learning was a great humanist. He was essentially the poet of man intensely interested in man and his affairs. He had large humanity and good humoured tolerance. He had no disdain for fools and no disgust for rascals. While gently unmasking the roguery of rogues he was grateful to them for the pleasure they gave. He loved to dwell on their funny traits, looked at their pranks and tricks with amused delight. Thus his humour was the offspring of large humanity and catholicity of temper without a grain of ill will and malice. His understanding sympathy with the seamy side of life, his keen sense of the ludicrous which made him alive to any incongruity or absurdity, his genial temperament which made him observe with amused delight and half-shut eyes the frailties and foibles of mankind—all these made him a great humorist. In his humour envenomed shafts of ridicule or cynical sneer or biting sarcasm characteristic of Voltaire or Swift do not generally exist. His vivacious fancy and playful imagination could raise bubbles of fun out of unexpected places. It brightens whatever it touches.

Humour takes many forms in literature. It can be used both in a broad and limited sense. In the narrow sense it means a little jolly good natured mirth. In its broader sense it stands for boisterous (fun), intellectual humour (wit), gentle or mirthful humour and bitter humour (satire). Chaucer's work reflects all these forms and shades of humour. His is the kaleidoscopic humour regaling both in horseplay and gentle smile, in caricature and mild satire. Albert has beautifully referred to the many sided humour of Chaucer : "In the literature of his time, when so few poets seem to have any perception of the fun in life, the humour of Chaucer is invigorating and delightful. The humour, which steeps nearly all his poetry has great variety : kindly and patronizing as in the case of the Clerk of Oxford, broad and semi-farcical, as in the Wife of Bath ; pointedly satirical, as in the Pardoner and the Summoner ; or coarse, as happens in the Tales of the Miller, the Reeve and the Pardoner. It is seldom that the satirical intent is wholly

lacking, as it is in the case of the Good Parson, but, except in rare cases, the satire is good humoured and well-meant. The prevailing feature of Chaucer's humour is its urbanity : the man of the world's kindly tolerance of the weaknesses of his erring fellow mortals." Indeed, for all his considerable powers of pathos," says Compton-Rickett, "his happy fancy, his-lucid imagination, it is as a great humorist that he lingers longest in our memories, with a humour, rich, profound and sane, devoid of spite and cynicism, irradiated by a genial kindliness and a consummate knowledge of human nature".

Chaucer's humour is all pervading and all pervasive. In the plays of Shakespeare humour is not only limited to comedy but equally well colours his tragedies. The Portar Scene in *Macbeth* and The Grave Digger Scene in *Hamlet* are examples of Shakesperean humour in tragedy. Chaucer's humour is also all pervasive. Compton-Rickett remarks about this aspect of Chaucer's humour. "There are tragedies as well as comedies in the Tales; some are grave and subdued, others ablaze with colour and merriment, but the thread of honest and kindly laughter runs through them all, serious and gay alike".

Chaucer raises humour at his own cost as at the cost of his pilgrims. He spares not even himself and cracks many a jest at his own expense. He refers to himself as a simple unlettered man.

'My wit is short, ye may well understand'.

He takes delight in raising a gentle smile at himself when he speaks of his fancied shortcomings and poverty in a simpering tone. He has given a humorous description of himself in the Prologue to the *Tale of Sir Thopas.* Similar humorous references to himself occur in the *House of Fame* and Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.* In the *House of Fame*, he dreams that he is carried up to heaven by an eagle. In mid air he speculates on the reason

for this sudden seizure, and the dialogue between the poet and the golden eagle which conveys him to the House of Fame is an example of the elvish humour of Chaucer.

In *Troilus and Criseydë*, Chaucer creates the character of Pandarus who is a master piece of delightful humour. Pandarus is Chaucer's Falstaff, a great comic creation.

The *Canterbury Tales*, the most matured and varied work of the poet, reveals his gift of humour in all its amplitude and variety. The jolly band of pilgrims with the merry Host of Tabard constitutes the most hilarious and the most uproarious company ever assembled in that hostelry—the Tabard Inn. Most of these portraits are enlivened by humorous touches, and this pageant of merry pilgrims lives vividly in memory With deft light touches of sly humour he has fixed them on the canvas of the mind with their features clearly limned.

The variety of humour is well noticed in the humorous delineation of the various pilgrims. There is the lighthearted touch of a genial humorist when Chaucer characterises the nun, a Prioress. He makes a sly dig at her tenderness when he says that she was so charitable and so tender-hearted that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap. Though a Prioress, she indulged in love making. About her arm was a coral rosary, the larger beads of green, upon which was hung a broach of shining gold on which was engraved the motto—'*Amor Vincit Omnia.*

'She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous
Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde'.

The humour in the case of the Clerk of Oxford is *kindly and patronizing* : The horse of the Clerk of Oxford was as lean as a rake and his little outer cloak was threadbare. He was a scholar in shreds and above all he loved to learn and to teach.

'But all be that he was a philosophre
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre.'

Generally speaking Chaucer's humour is harmless and genial. Even when he desires to satirise any one he does it through irony in a wild manner. This quality is noticed in the portraiture of the monk—

And I say his opinion was good;
Why should he studie and make him selven wood,
Upon a book in cloistre alway to pore
Or swinken with his hands and laboure,
As Austin bit? How shall the world be served.
Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.

Chaucer's humour becomes *broad and semi-farcical* when he describes the Wife of Bath. All her life she was a worthy woman; she had five husbands at church door, besides other company in her youth. She was gap-toothed. Well could she laugh and prate in company. Love and its remedies she knew all about. Such was the Wife of Bath. Chaucer has presented her in broad and semifarcical humorous touches.

'In felaweschip wel coude she laughe and carpe
Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
For she coude of that art the olde daunce'

Chaucer's humour gets a little *coarse and rough* when he presents the Miller and the Reeve. He hits the hypocritical Reeve—

'His lord wel coude he plesen subtilly
To yeve and lene him of his owne good,
And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood."

The *Satirical tone of Chaucer's humour* is well presented in the characters of the Monk, the Friar, the Franklyn, the Pardoner and the Summoner. These ecclesiastical characters have been satirically pictured though even in the satirical vein there is the absence of the gall and venom which we notice in Langland. The *Friar* had married off many a young woman and yet he was a noble pillar of his order!

It accorded not with a man of his importance to have acquaintance with sick lepers, but to have dealings with the rich folk and sellers of victual. The *Franklin* was a pleasure seeker. He was ever wont to live in pleasure for he was a very son of Epicurus. His bread and his wine were ever alike of the best; never were a man's wine-vaults better stored. The *Pardoner* was a gull. With flattering deceit and tricks, he made the parson and the people his dupes. He sang merrily to win his silver.

There is the presence of *ironic humour* when the poet gives the description of Madame Eglantyne's French:

> "*And French she spak ful fair and fetisly*
> *After the scole of Strat ford atte Bowe,*
> *For French of Paris was to her unknown.*"

Chaucer's remarks about the Doctor of Physic are equally ironical.

> "*For gold in physik is a cordial,*
> *Therefore he lovede gold in special.*"

There are the various aspects of Chaucer's humour, and we have the best that we can from this poet in the characters of the *Prologue*.

There is humour also in the general plan and setting of the *Canterbury Tales.* The broad and boisterous Harry Bills—the lordly host of Tabard—as the Commander of this merry and motely regiment of pilgrims has all his tact and authority to keep them in order and save them from fighting. The set of pilgrims on the way are like members of the crew of Comus than holy pilgrims. The provide a humorous spectacle of humanity on the move as we meet them in their journey. As the cavalcade pursues its course, Chaucer shows the pilgrims calling to each other, criticising each other and squabbling with each other. "They shout and swear, laugh and weep, interrupt the

story teller, pass compliments and thereby keep alive the spirit of life." In this way a comedy of action goes through the whole poem and the spectacle of the pilgrims provides the best of life in the lighter vein. It is safe to say that a great deal of the vivacity and veracity in Chaucer's portraits and picture of life is due to this all pervading humour. No one can deny it.

Q. "Chaucer found his English a dialect and left it a language." Amplify.

Or

Write a note on Chaucer's language and versification. Why is Chaucer called, 'the well of English undefiled ?'

Ans. It is said that Emperor Augustus had found Rome a city of brick and when he died he left it a city of marble. He rendered meritorious services to the Roman Empire. Similarly it can be said of Chaucer that he found English a dialect and left it a language well fitted to express the finest thoughts of the literary artists of his time. Lows has remarked that Chaucer, "found his native tongue a dialect and left it a language." It means that Chaucer rendered an incalculable service to the English language by making it an instrument of social, political, and literary thought. He rendered the same service to the English language as Dante, the Italian poet had done to the Italian language. He harmonized, regulated and made popular the still discordant elements of the national speech.

In England in 1360 no dialect had as yet taken the lead for literary purposes. These was no one standard form of speech which claimed pre-eminence over the others. English was split up into four dialects differing sufficiently from each other to hamper intercommunication. The difference in vocabulary and syntax were such as to render

a man barely intelligible to those who did not speak his own dialect. The three principal dialects were the Southern, Midland and Northern. Of these the Midland or to be more precise, the East Midland dialect was the simplest in its grammatical structure and freer from inflections than the other two. It bore, thus, a close resemblance in appearance and substance to the language of to-day. This *East Midland dialect* had found favour with the poets and prose writers of the times. Wyclif had translated the Bible in this dialect and Gower after making experiments in French and Latin languages had come round to the East Midland dialect in his English work *Confessio Amantis*. Chaucer following the lead of Gower popularised the East Midland dialect and gave it a new form and shape till it became the suitable medium of expression both in the court and in the universities. It was a great task that Chaucer undertook to perform because the difficulties in his way were numerous and equally formidable. Latin and French languages were still in vogue and holding sway over the minds of the people and were being employed by poets and prose writers in their works. Under the inspiring leadership of Chaucer, the law courts banished Norman French in 1362 and the Parliament followed suit in the same year. In 1385 the schools adopted it as well. Chaucer was heralded as the first national poet who gave to the people a language, so reformed and reshaped, as to be a potent instrument for the expression of thought. The *Canterbury Tales* is a land mark in the history of English poetry as well as in the English language. The language of Chaucer is as intelligible as that of Shakespeare and Spenser. English before Chaucer could not be understood without the aid of a grammar and a glossary, but Chaucer's language is quite intelligible even to-day without the help of a grammar or a glossary. Chaucer's contribution to the development of English was in making the dialect of London the standard for future writers and the parent of current modern English. He imparted to his native tongue smoothness and suppleness which it had known since the Norman times, and breathed into this dialect a high poetical life. Blake has well summed up Chaucer's contribution

to the English language in the following words, "It was Chaucer's good fortune rather than his merit, that the natural vehicle of his poetry should have been that form of English speech, which for geographical and political reasons, was bound to become the prevailing standard of the literary language of England, namely, the dialect of London. Chaucer, being by birth a Londoner, spoke and wrote a language, the basis of which was East Midland, but which was largely affected by Southern and Kentish peculiarities."

Chaucer's Versification.

The only form of versification known to the people of England before Chaucer was alliteration. Chaucer made substantial improvements and additions to English versification. Two of the most important poems of the fourteenth century *viz*, *Piers the Plowman* and *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight* were written in alliterative verse. The use of the ancient metre in these poems was partly inspired by the revival of poetry in the West Midland. But alliterative verse was still the main attraction in poetic expression. Rime was also employed and poets before Chaucer showed the greatest ingenuity in devising complex stanza-forms, which fashioned their rimes down in the most complicated pattern in stanza-forms.

Chaucer had no liking for rimes and no love for alliterative verse. He made a travesty of the doggeral rhymes in the *Rhyme of Sir Thopas*. This work is a capital burlesque of the metrical romances of his times.

Chaucer employed three principal metres : the eightsyllable line, rhyming in couplets, as in the *Book of the Duchess* ; the tensyllable line, also rhyming in couplets, as in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* ; and the same line arranged in seven-line stanzas (known later as "rhyme royal") as in *Troilus*. The heroic couplet he introduced into English verse ; the rhyme royal he invented. In his

shorter poems he made, however, endless metrical experiments, and showed a mastery of intricate verse forms, remarkable even in an age when the French had made verse-writing a matter of almost gymnastic skill. Chief among these are the difficult but exquisite rondel "*Now welcom somer with thy sonne softe,*" which closes the "*Parliament of Fowls*" and the ballad, "Flee fro the prees." In the '*Monk's Tale*' there is a melodious measure which may have furnished the model for Spenser's famous stanza.

In the sixteenth century and later, when owing to the changes in pronunciation (especially the loss of a final "e" from thousands of words and grammatical forms), the secret of Chaucer's versification was lost. He was regarded as a barbarous writer, ignorant of prosody, and with no ear for the melody of verse. But this was a wrong approach to the poet's metrical skill and melodious verse. "Chaucer was an artist in verse effects, who not only wrote with a metrical accuracy, fluency, and variety that have rarely been surpassed but, also paid constant and delicate heed to the niceties of rhythm and tone-colour. In a half humorous address to his Scrivener Adam, he calls down curses upon that unworthy servant for spoiling good verses by bad copying, and in *Triolus* he beseeches his readers not to "mismetre" his book, (Moody and Lovett).

Chaucer's poetry is extremely musical and must be judged by the ear rather than by the eye. From his very earliest poems his work is almost faultless and as he progressed in skill, his music became constantly more varied and flexible. His early manner reaches its height in the exquisite rondel. intricate in form but handled with grear simplicity of effect, which brings the *Paliament of Fowls* to a melodious close. A good example of his late music may be found in the description of the Temple of Venus in the *Knight's Tale* ; or, as a study in a graver key, in the ballad 'Flee Fro the Press', which makes so impressively the deepening seriousness of Chaucer's mind in his later years.

Elaborating Chaucer's musical skill Long very beautifully remarks, "Chaucer's poetry is extremely musical and

must be judged by the ear rather than by the eye. To the modern reader, the lines appear broken and uneven; but if one reads them over a few times, he soon catches the perfect swing of the measure, and finds that he is in the hands of a master whose ear is delicately sensitive to the smallest accent. There is a lilt in all his lines which is marvellous when we consider that he is the first to show us the poetic possibilities of the language. His claim upon our gratitude is twofold; first for discovering the music that is in our English speech; and second, for his influence in fixing the Midland (East) dialect as the literary language of England".

Concluding Chaucer's contribution to English diction and versification, it can be safely said that his services to English metre and diction were immense. He had a firm grasp on the true way of wedding the stressed and syllabic systems, by accommodating metrical ictus to natural accent. Above all, he naturalised the iambic pentametre, first in stanzas of eight or of seven lines, the latter the famous rhyme royal; then in the still more famous heroic couplet. The tetrametre is a fine measure in its way, but for variety and flexibility it is far inferior to the pentametre, how far we can scarcely realise better than by turning from Chaucer to his contemporary Gower. He abandoned altogether the old English irregular lines and alliteration. "rim, ram, roff as he jestingly called it"—and adopted the French method of regular metre and end-rimes. Under his influence rime gradually displaced alliteration in English poetry. He was justly called:

"The morning star of song, who made,
His music heard below,
Don Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath
Preluded those melodious bursts that fill,
The spaciaus times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still."

Q. "Chaucer is the earliest of the great moderns" (Albert). Discuss.

Or

Why is Chaucer regarded the father of English poetry? What solid contributions did he make to English poetry, drama and novel?

Ans. Chaucer is regarded as the father of English poetry and the earliest of the great moderns. In those dark days when the light of modernism had not been visible on the horizon. Chaucer anticipated the modern taste and the modern mind. and in his poetry introduced qualities for in advance of his times. Though Chaucer could not write a drama or a novel as we know it, but his works contain the seeds both of the modern drama and the novel. If he had lived a few years hence he would certainly have been our first dramatist and novelist just as he is the first true national poet of England.

Chaucer made several contributions to English poetry and his debt is so great that it can never be repaid even by the most exalted panegyrics that may be written for him. Chaucer enlarged the scope and range of the poet, introduced minute observation of life around him, gave vivid and clear descriptions of the conditions of his times, excelled in characterisation, humour and pathos, made narration an art and above all gave a new form and shape to the language and versification. As Albert says, "All the Chaucerian features help to create this modern atmosphere: the shrewd and placidly humorous observation, the wide humanity, the quick aptness of phrase, the dexterous touch upon the metre, and above all, the fresh and formative *spirit*—the genius turning dross into gold." With these remarks let us examine, in sport, the various features of Chaucer's poetry and his main contributions.

National Poet.

Chaucer was the first great national poet of England giving full expression to the new hopes and aspirations of

the people of his times. He voiced through his poetry that national unity which had been brought about by the fusion of the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons. The growing influence of France was checked and for the first time the poet in the natural language of England gave expression to the life, ideals, hopes and aspirations of the people of the 14th century belonging to his country.

His Observation and Realism.

Modern poetry is characterised by realism. The modern poet is a keen observer of the various tendencies of his times which are being put by him in poetry. This modern note of realism had been sounded by Chaucer long ago in the 14th century. He made a thorough study of his time in its varied aspects and gave expression to its hopes and aspirations, its fears and doubts in his *Canterbury Tales*. He reflected his century not in fragments but as a whole and was its chronicler as Frossiart had been of France during the same time. He had the innate instinct to catch within his purview the soul of his generation in all its fulness and its depth. He had the seeing eye, the retentive memory, the judgment to select, and the capacity to expound. His observations about his times are true and realistic, and not set forth with the vision of a dreamy allegorist. He stands in much the same relation to the life of his time as Pope does to the earlier phases of the eighteenth century and Tennyson to the Victorian age.

His Description.

"Chaucer's best descriptions, of men, manners and places are of the first rank in their beauty, impressiveness and humour. Even when he follows the common example of his time, as when giving details of conventional spring mornings and flowery gardens he has a vivacity that makes his poetry unique." (Albert).

His power of describing his fellowmen with all their merits and demerits, their tastes and temperament, was

unique and the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* is a picture gallery bringing in its scope all classes of people ranging from the Knight to the Miller and the Cook.

His Humanity and Tolerance.

His descriptions of his fellowmen reveal his wide humanity and toleration and prepare the way for Shakespeare. "Of all writers of genius Chaucer is the one with whom it is easiest to have a sense of comradeship" says Legouis. Chaucer's wide sympathy and gentle humanity make him adorable and lovable among the English poets. He is not repelled. He takes interest in his fellowmen. He becomes one with them and does not fall foul on them like Langland. Cruelty and Chaucer are poles apart. He has no disdain for the fools and no disgust for rascals. He is the poet of humanity. "Where Langland cries aloud in anger threatening the world with hell fire, Chaucer looks on and smiles." (Aldous Huxley)

His Narrative Art.

Chaucer made notable contribution to the art of story telling, and what Morris did later on in '*Earthly Paradise*' was achieved by him in the *Canterbury Tales*. He is the supreme story teller in verse. In his stories the narration, inspite of certain digressions and philosophical reflections, is straightforward and unhampered. He infuses humour in his narration and makes his stories life like and living. There may be long speeches in his stories, a common fault of the times, but "when he rises above the weaknesses common to the time, he is terse, direct and vivacious."

(Albert).

Characterisation.

Chaucer made significant contribution to the art of characterisation. "Chaucer is the first great painter of character" say Ward, "because he is first great observer of it among European writers." He presents his characters in

a masterly manner. His characters are both individuals and types. They are timeless creations on a time determined stage. Every age in Canterbury pilgrimage is the pilgrimage of the world and the pilgrims the epitome of mankind. His characters like those of Shakespeare are life like and we cannot forget them. The Knight, the Friar, the Pardoner, the Wife of Bath, the Doctor of Physic are living characters and have an eternal freshness about them. "Chaucer has the power of getting into some one else's character. His understanding of the men and women of whom he writes is complete. His slightest character-sketches are always solid and dimensional." (Aldous Huxley).

His Humour and Pathos.

In the literature of the 14th century when so few poets seem to have any perception of the fun in life, Chaucer's humour is invigorating and delightful. Chaucer is in the grand tradition of the great humorists and while his humour may have the peculiar English tinge and flavour yet it has also the essence of all true humour. This places him in the very first line of humorists—Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais, Moliereand Dickens. His genial humour cuts across the barriers of time and custom, language and idiom and refreshes and exhilarates us like a tonic as it did the prince and clown, the clergy and laity of a Feudal age. His understanding sympathy with the seamy side of life, his keen sense of the ludicrous, which made him alive to any incongruity or absurdity, his genial temperament which made him observe with amused delight and halfshut eyes the frailties and foibles of mankind—all these made him a great humorist. "The humour, which steeps nearly all his poetry" says Albert, "has great variety; kindly and patronizing as in the case of the Clerk of Oxford; broad and semi-farcical, as in the Wife of Bath; pointedly satirical, as in the Pardoner and the Summoner; or coarse, as happens in the tales of the Miller, the Reeve and the Pardoner. The prevailing feature of Chaucer's humour is its urbanity: the man of the world's kindly tolerance of the weaknesses of his erring fellowmortals".

Chaucer lays less emphasis on pathos but it is not overlooked. In the poetry of Chaucer the sentiment is human and unforced. We have excellent examples of pathos in the *Tale of the Prioress* and *The Legend of Good Women.*

Chaucer's pathos is not sentimental. He exhibits sympathy for inevitable sorrow. This distinguishes him from Boccaccio and makes him the precursor of *Hamlet* and *Othello.*

Love for Fresh Outdoor Life.

"A specially charming feature of his poetry is its freshness and out-of-doors atmosphere. His descriptions of the country are often indeed in the conventional manner of his time, and his garden landscape and May flowers are to some extent things of tradition only. But he has a real love of nature and particularly of spring and when he writes of these, as in the *Prologue* and the *Knight's Tale*, the personal accent is unmistakble." (Hudson).

Dramatic Elements in his Poetry.

"Chaucer has been called "a dramatist in all but the fact." "We have all elements of drama in his tales—story, characterization, dialogue, conflict and setting. He is essentially dramatist, and if his great work does not appear in the conventional dramatic form it is an accident of the time, and by no means prove a want of power of original conceptional or of artistic skill in the author. The admirable conception of character, the consumate skill with which each is sustained and developed, and the nature, life and spirit of the dialogue, abundantly prove that if the drama had been known in Chaucer's time as a branch of living literature, he might have attained to as a branch of living literature, he might have attained to as high an excellence in comedy as any English or continental writer."

Chaucer's method of narration is dramatic. All his characters talk in a dramatic manner. The most sustained dramatic character is that of the Host. The spirit of comedy pervades through his tales.

As a Precursor of the Novel.

In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Canterbury Tales*, we have the seeds of the novel which was cultivated by Fielding at a later stage. The *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* is the Prologue to modern fiction. It is the preface to *Don Quixote* and the preface to *Gil Blas*. The tales with their characters and their atmosphere are novels in miniature. Delightful as are these tales of the Canterbury pilgrims, yet the poem in which Chaucer moves towards the novel is *Troilus and Criseyde*. "Its heroine is the subtlest piece of psychological analysis in medieval fiction; and the shrewd and practical Pandarus is a character whose presence of itself brings the story down from the heights of romance to the plains of real life."

Chaucer's Contribution to Language and Versification.

Chaucer made notable contribution to the English language and versification. In 1360 English was split in four dialects. Chaucer popularised, reshaped and reformed the East Midland dialect and gave it the form of the standard tongue. He imparted to his native tongue smoothness and suppleness which it had not known since the Norman times and breathed into this dialect a high poetical life.

In the sphere of versification, Chaucer made substantial contributions. He cast aside alliteration and doggerel rhyme, and employed three principal metres: the eight syllable line rhyming in couplets as in the *Book of the Duchess*; the ten-syllable line also rhyming in couplets as in the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, and the same line arranged in seven-line stanzas (known as "rhyme yroal")

as in *Troilus*. The heroic couplet he introduced into English verse; the rhyme royal he invented. In his shorter poems he made, however, endless metrical experiments and showed a mastery of intricate verse forms remarkable even in an age when the French had made verse-writing a matter of almost gymnastic skill.

Chaucer kept the sense of melody. From his very earliest poems his work is almost faultless and as he progressed in skill his music became constantly more varied and flexible. He was an artist in verse effects, who not only wrote with a metrical accuracy, fluency and variety that have rarely been surpassed, but also paid constant and delicate heed to the niceties of rhythm and tone-colour.

His Defects.

Some critics have found certain flaws in Chaucer's poetry. Matthew Arnold found Chaucer deficient in sublime ideals and high seriousness. Arnold says, "To our praise, therefore, of Chaucer as a poet there must be this limitation; he lacks the high seriousness of the great Classics and therefore an important part of their virtues". Another shortcoming of Chaucer is said to be the lack of true lyricism in his poetry. He is also charged by Albert "for a fondness for long speeches, for pedantic digressions on such subjects as dreams and ethical problems, and for long explanations when none are necessary."

Conclusion.

Whatever may be shortcomings of Chaucer as a poet, it cannot be denied that he rendered meritorious service to English literature in a variety of ways. He was a genius born at a time when the lights were yet hazy. By the alembic of his genius he created something of lasting and permanent value in literature. After Chaucer followed a century of arid barrennes, and the supremacy and greatness of the poet become apparent when we view him in the light of his followers.

Q. Write a short essay on the ecclesiastical figures in the prologue.

Ans.—The Ecclesiastical figures in the prologue. Chaucer is essentially a catholic, his spirit is the catholic spirit, essentially the spirit, of christianity. "Reformers may rail at it, but they cannot prove that it is weak or base." No doubt we cannot put any religious badge upon Chaucer, but it cannot be denied that the religious sense was not absent from his world of experience. He does not attack like Wyclif or Lollard any principle or dogma of Christian religion but certainly he cannot tolerate the growing corruption, laxity of discipline and love of luxury of the clergy. He, therefore, satirises discrepancies between the duties and actions of the ecclesiastics. The picture of the Clergy as presented by him is not at all encouraging. The monks had forgotten their original rule of poverty and labour; Chaucer's monk is a fat, well-fed individual, who is more interested in hunting than in his religious duties. Madam Eglantyne is a teacher of young ladies, speaks French, is exquisite in her table manners, affecting the stately behaviour of the court. Other ecclesiastics are hangerson and caterpillars of the church : the Friar, intimate with hospitable franklins, innkeepers and worthy women and despising beggars and lazars ; the Summoner, a repulsive person with "fire—red cherabin face" ; the Pardoner with his bag full of pardons "come from Rome all hot" and bits of cloth and pig's bones which he sells as relics of holy saints. Chaucer further presents a contrast by introducing a 'poor Parson'. He like Wyclif comes forward to reform the church'. He was 'rich of holy thoughts and work'.

The ecclesiastics, therefore as is clear from the Prologue, can be divided into two groups : (1) Clerical Order—Village Parson ; Summoner. (2) Monastic Order—Benedictine Monk; Prioress ; Prioress's Nun ; Pardoner.

The Village Parson.

Professor Skeat remarks that "Chaucer, in his description of the parson, contrasts the piety and industry of the

secular clergy with the wickedness and laziness of the religious orders or monks". This goes a little beyond the record. Chaucer's characters are individuals, and we cannot fairly say that because he drew as good parish priest, a good knight and a good clerk he meant to hold up kinghts, parish priests or clerks for our admiration as contrasted with other professions. G.M. Trevelyan writes "The inadequate stipends of many parsons caused many of the less faithful to desert their ill-paid duties." "It has come to our ears," wrote Archbishop Sudbury 'that rectors of our diocese scord to keep due residence in their churches, and go to dwell in distant and perhaps unhonest places, without our license, and let their churches out to farm to persons less fitted. Lay persons with their wives and children some times dwell in their rectories, frequently keeping taverns and others foul and unhonest things in them." Many parsons without leaving a vicar in charge, deserted their dull round of duties among an ignorant and half-savage peasantry, to live in the great cities or in the mansions of the nobility. Here it was not hard for them to get employment as chantry priests, to sing private masses : with the money earned for such easier tasks they eked out the pittance received for parish duties which they were neglecting.

As the tithes and dues were partially or wholly alienated the parish priest was in great need of a good stipend from the patron of the living. But Bishops and Parliaments combined to keep these stipends down by Ordinances and statutes comparable to the statutes of Labourers.

The Black Death had made priests scarce, and like the labourers they took advantage of the scarcity to try to improve their social position. How low that position was, is illustrated by the chronicler's remark that these limitation of their stipends forced many to steal. One is glad to find that the Act was no more successful than the Acts for keeping down other wages, since a Statute of Henry the fifth's reign complained that persons refused to serve for less than ten, eleven, or even twelve marks.

While the poor parsons were thus tempted to desert their flocks to gain an easier livelihood, we know from Bishop's visitation enquiries, the attacks of Satirists, and the complaints of Wyclif, that other parish priests were concerned chiefly to make themselves useful to the patron or agreeable to his lady, and that others again, where their benefinces were rich ones, showed themselves as fond of hunting and as extravagant in dress as Chaucer's Monk. We can thus draw no general conclus on as to the merits of the parish clergy of the fourteenth century from this portrait of one priest, beyond the fact that there were some saints to be found among them.

It is rather surprising to a modern reader to find the Parson depicted in the Ellesmere manuscript as wearing a red gown, but in the fourteenth century this seems to have been the usual colour for a parish priest to wear.

Chaucer's Parson was poor but rich in holy thought and deed. He was a learned man also, a clerk but would faithfully preach christ's gospel and devoutly instruct his parishness. Being wondrous diligent and patient in adversity, such he was often times proved. Right loath he was to excommunicate for unpaid tithes but rather give to his poor parishners out of the church alms and eke out his own substance ; in little he found sufficiency. His parish was wide and the houses far apart, but for thunder or rain he neglected not to visit, the farthest, great or small in sickness or misfortune going on foot a staff in his hand. The noble example he gave to his sheep that first he wrought and afterwards taught these words, he worked out of the gospel and this similitude he added eke that, "If Gold rust, what shall iron do ?" For if a priest upon whom we trust be foul, no wonder that an ignorant layman be corrupt, and it is shame (if a priest will but heed it) that a shepherd should be defiled and the sheep clean. A priest should give good example by his clean lines how his sheep sould live. He would not farm out his benefice, nor have his sheep stuck fast in the mire whilst he ran to London to St. Paul's to

get an easy office of chantry-priest—or to be retained by some guilt, but dwelt at home of and guarded his fold full well, so that the wolf may not miscarry it. He was no hireling but a shepherd. And though he were holy and virtuous he was not pitiless to sinful men nor cold or haughty of speech, but both disceet and benign in his teaching, to draw folk upto heaven by his fair life and good example ; this was his care. But when a man were stubborn whether of high or low state, he would chide him sharply. There was nowhere a better priest than he. He looked for no pomp or reverence nor yet was his conscience over—nice, but the teaching of Christ and his apostles he taught, and first he followed it himself.

Summoner :—

The Somonour was a 'fine red- cherubin-faced fellow, salt phlegmed and pimply with narrow eyes, scaly black eyebrows and their ragged beard and as hot and lacherous as a sparrow. Children were terrified of his visage. No quicksilver, white lead, brimstone, borax, nor ceruse, no cream of tartar, nor any ointment, that would clean and burn, could help his white blotches or the knobs on his chaps. He loved garlic, onions and strong wine as red as blood and then after drinking he would taik and cry out like the mad and would speak no word but Latin, in which he had a few terms two or three learned out of some canon. No wonder was that for he heard all at all day long and you know well how a jay 'call' 'wat' after long hearing it ; as well as the Pope could. But if he were tested in any other paint his learning was found to be all spent. "Questio quid Juris" he was ever crying. He was a kind rogue and a gentle, a better fellow ; for a quart of wine he would suffer a good fellow to have his paramour a twelve month and utterly wink at it and privily he practised the same, himself ! And if anywhere, he found a good fellow, he would teach in such case to have no fear of the archdeacon's excommunication, unless, a man's soul is in his purse for it was in his purse, he should be punished. "The archdeacon's hell is

his purse" he said. But well he lied in his teeth, every guilty man should fear the Church's curse, for it will slay even as absolution saves—and also let him beware of a "Significant" within his jurisdiction on his own terms he had all the young folk of the diocese and knew their guilty secrets and was their chief adviser. He had a garland on his head large enough for an ale house sign and carried a round loaf of bread as big as a buckler.

"The Summoner or Apparitor" was the officer of the ecclesiastical court of the Bishop, or his subordinate, the Archdeacon. This court dealt with sins of immorality, witchcraft, usury, simony, neglect of the sacraments, and with holding tiles or offerings, a list of offences taken from the beginning of the tale about a wicked summoner which Chaucer puts into the mouth of the Friar. The Archdeacon extorted fines by threats of ex-communication, the fact of ex-communication, when notified to a civil magistrate, procuring the offenders imprisonment. The Summoners made a living for themselves, over and above their lawful fees, by threatening to report people to the Archdeacon for real or imaginary offences, unless they were brought off. The Ellesmere Manuscript shows the Summoner in a blue jacket with Scarlet pantalloons, whereas his official costume appears to have been of a tawny colour. He wears a garland and carries a cake as mentioned by Chaucer, and holds out a writ of summons in his hand".

Ecclesiastical Characters of the Monastic Order : The Monk.

Chaucer's monk is exceedingly fine and imposing, a great rider about the country side and a lover of hunting, a manly man withal, fit to be an abbot. He had many a blooded horse in his stable, and when he rode, men could hear his bridle gingling in a whistling wind as clear and loud as the chapel bell which this lord was prior of. Because the rule of St. Maur of St. Bennet was old and something austere, this same Monk let such old things pass and

followed the ways of the newer world. He gave not a plucked hen for the text that the hunters are not holy or that a careless monk (that is to say, are out of his cloister) is like a fish out of water; for that text he would not give a hearing. His opinion was right, why he should study or love, his bits ever pouring over a book in the cloister or foil with his hands and labour as St. Austin bids? How shall the world be served? Let St. Austin have his work to himself. Therefore he rode hard, followed grey-hounds as swift as the birds on the wings. All his pleasure was in the riding and hunting the hare, and he spared no cost there on. He had sleeves edged at the wrist with fine dark fur, the finest in the country, and to fasten his hood under his chin he had a fine wrought brooch of gold; in the larger end was a love-knot. His bald head shone like glass; so did his face, as if it had been anointed. He was a sleek fat lord. His bright eyes rolled in his head glowing like the fire under cauldron. His boots were of rich soft leather. He was certainly a fine Prelate. He was not pale like a wasted ghost, best of any hand, he loved a fat roasted swan. His palfry was as brown as a berry.

"The best proof that Chaucer's sketch of the hunting monk is not exaggerated is the fact that all the chief points he mentions are to be found in the articles of the 'Visitation of Selborne Priory'

The Prioress

[See Chaucer's Attitude to Women]

(*The Nun*—See Chaucer Attitude to Women—)

The Pardoner

The Pardoner of Rouncivale was gentle and Summoner's friend and compeer who straight came from the court of Rome. He sang full loudly "Come hither, love to me" while the Summoner bore him a stiff bass, never was

trumpet of half such a sound. This pardoner hand waxy-yellow hair, hanging smooth, like a hank of flax, spread over his shoulders in thin strands. For sport he wore no hood which was trussed up in his wallet; riding with his hair dishevelled, bare headed save for his cap; he thought he was all in the newest fashion. His eyes were glaring like a hare's; he had a vernicle served on his cap and his wallet, brimful of pardons hot from Rome lay before him on his saddle. His voice was as small as a goat's. He had no beard, nor ever would have, his face was as smooth as if lately shaven. In truth he looked like a mare or a gelding. But as for his trade from Berwick to Dover there was not such another Pardoner. In his bag he had a pillow case which he said was over lady's kerchief and a small pice of the Sail which he said St. Peter had when he walked upon the sea and Jesus Christ taught him. He had a cross set full of false gems or pig's bones in a glass. But these relics, when he found a poor Parson dwelling in the country, in one day, got him more money than the Parson got in two months. And this with flattering deceit and tricks, he made the Parson and the people his dupes. But to give him his due, after all he was a noble ecclesiastic in the church; he could read well a lesson or legend and best of all sing a prayer. For he knew that when that was done, he must preach and file his tongue smooth, to win silver as he well knew how. Therefore he sang merrily and loud.

"The Ellesmere Manuscript shows the long yellow hair, spread in parted locks upon the Pardoner's shoulders, his surcoat of scarlet trimmed with white, and his scarlet cap with the vernicle in front. His stockings are blue. In his hand he carries the cross of Laton, a kind of brass or mixed metal, coloured at the points, yellow, red and blue. The white lamb-skin wallet, bearing such precious relics, rests on the horse's back and is carefully guarded by strings, which the Pardoner has hung round his neck". [Saunders]

Most Important Explanations

FROM

Chaucer's Prologue

KNOW THIS & KNOW ALL

In the Prologue to Canterbury Tales *"Several personages are described with consummate skill. In a few lines we are made acquainted with their features and dress, their manners and characters ; they stand out before us in strong individuality, not like portraits in a picture gallery, but as men and women living, acting, talking with us".*

Most Important Explanations

From

Chaucer's Prologue

(1) *Ful worthy was he....................*
.... his worthynesse. (Lines 47—50)

Modern English :—He (Knight) way very valiant in his lord's war, and had compaigned, no man farther, both in Christendom and in heathen lands, and was ever honoured for his bravery.

Explanation :—Chaucer describes the Knight first in the the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, most probably because he considers him the most distinguished of the company or perhaps, because he admired the Knight's Tale more than the other tales of the series and wished to place it at the head of his collections. This Knight, may be Jean, Seigneur de Roubais (a French Knight) who died in 1449, was an accomplished man and was full of truth, honour, freedom and courtesy. He was valiant and brave. He had like many other knights of that age, served, when his own country was at peace, under serveral foreign princes as a volunteer or free lance. He had participated in the war of his feudal superior, ultimately or immediately, Edward III. (Some of the old commentators took his Lord to refer to Christ). He had compaigned against the non-believers in Christianity (*i.e.* the Muslims & the Moors in the 14th century) and had fought against them in far off lands. He was undoubtedly, a worthy man, with all the virtues of a true knight and was rightly regarded to be the ideal of moral excellence, 'a verray parfit, gentle knight'.

(2) *Embrauded was he ... ...*
.... fader at the table (Lines 89—100)
(*Punjab University*).

Modern English—His clothes were embroidered red and white, as it were a meadow full of fresh flowers. All the day long he was singing or playing upon his flute, he was as fresh as the month of May. His coat was short, with long, wide sleeves. Well could he sit on a horse and ride. He knew who to make songs, compose, joust, and dance, draw and write. He loved so ardently that at night time he slept no more than a nightingale. He was courteous, modest and helpful, and carved before his father at table

Explanation—Chaucer in these lines shows his typical descriptive power. The peculiarities of the Squire's dress, his means of entertainment and pleasure, and his manners are described with a masterly hand. The clothes of the Squire were particoloured They were red and white, sweet and smooth like the fresh flowers in a meadow. His coat was short, with long wide sleeves that was so very common in Chaucer's days. He was all the day singing and playing on the flute. He was as fresh as the month of May and as lively as the spring. Besides he was a man of many points. He was a good rider and could sit gracefully on the horse. He was a poet too and could make and compose songs. He could fight in a tournament. He could dance and draw and paint and write. He was a lover also. He loved so fervently and ardently that he slept no more at night than a nightingale. He had all the decomplishments associated with a gentleman in the Middle Ages. He was courteous, humble and serviceable. Carving the meat at the table and attending upon the guests of honour were two of the main duties of the Esquire. The former in particular, was looked upon as a gentleman's accomplishment.

Note--(1) According to Sandras, the description of the Squire's dress is taken from the dress of the Dieu d' Amours

in the *Roman de la Rose* In the Ellesmere manuscript he wears a green gown sprinkled all over with white and red flowers.

(2) **By nyghtertale**—This is a description of the conventional practice of love making. cultivated by the aristocratic lovers of Chaucer's day in imitation of the French.

(3) **Curteis**—Denotes that he was expert in the manners and etiquette of the court.

(4) **And carf** It was one of the principal duties of the Squire to carve for the company.

(3) *A sheaf of pecok* ....
... .*he al the usage.* (Lines 104—110)

Modern English—Under his belt he bore very carefully a sheef of peacock arrows, bright and sharp ; he knew how to arrange his gear like a yeoman ; his arrows flew aslant with trailing feathers ; in his hand he carried a mighty bow. His head was cropped, and his visage brown. He understood well all the practice of woodcraft.

Explanation—Chaucer describes his yeoman as carrying not only a bow, a sword and a buckler, which he could do on military service, but also a hunting horn, and guesses that he was a Forester. He had, therefore, plainly not been abroad with the Knight and we may imagine that the Squire and yeoman had ridden from some country place to meet the Knight and attend him on the pilgrimage which he was making before returning home.

This yeoman who was an attendent above the rank of a menial servant, was the servant of Chaucer's 'verray parfit gentil knyght.' He wore a coat and a hood of green. His arrows were not plummed with goose feathers which were generally mentioned as the best ; they were winged with peacock feathers and he, as the habit was, carried them in the belt. He knew well who to set in order or

make straight his arrows and bow. His arrows were not trimmed with 'high' feathers but with feathers 'low'. They were light and swift and did not droop in their flight. His bow was long and not the 'cross bow' which was used for the chase. Like all other yeomen who had won the battles of Crecy and Poitiers, he too was very much skilled in bowmanship. Besides all this, his head was closely cropped and shaven and he had a brown face.

(*4*) *Ful weel she soong. . . . .*
. . . . .in her sauce depe. (Lines 122—129).

Modern English—Well she sang the divine service, beautifully intoned through her nose. And French she spoke properly well after the manner of Statford-le-Bow, for Parisian French was unfamiliar to her. She was also taught well the art of eating, she let no morsel fall from her lips, nor did she wet her fingers deeply in the sauce.

Explanation—Chaucer's pen picture of the Prioress has a very gentle satire. He suggests that there was some little affectation both in his Proiress's religion and in her fine manners. She was called Madame Eglentine and was the head of a convent which was not devoted entirely to religious training, but also served as finishing school for the daughters of the rich and well-to-do.

Madam Eglentine sang Matins. Lands, Prime, Tierce, Sext, Nones, Vespers, Compline very well. Her singing was usually nasal. Chaucer's is here simply stating a fact, not in itself ludicrous. He gives it, however, a ludicrous turn by mischievously adding 'full semely'.

The prioress spoke the French she had been taught as the Benedictine Nunnery at Startford, which differed from 'French of Paris' because it was the French that had developed in England from the Norman French spoken by the Norman invaders. Her French was not so elegant as that of Paris.

The Prioress had good table manners too. Never a morsel drooped from her lips nor did ever her fingers wet in the sauce.

Note—(*i*) The manners of the Prioress are described in accordance with the manners of the day. The passage is an almost literal translation from *Roman de la Rose* (Lines 14178—14199).

(*ii*) Madam Eglentine certainly represents a medival type. But she is so vividly individualized in this beautiful portrait that one can hardly doubt Chaucer had a particular young lady in mind in describing her.

(5) *But for to speken. . . . .*
. . : . . . . *were deed or bledde.* (Lines 142—145).

Modern English—But, to speak of her sensibility, she was so charitable and compassionate that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in trap, if it were dead or bleeding.

Explanation—Chaucer has not only portrayed the affection of the Prioress in matters of Religion and table manners but also in sensibility and feeling. She was so tender of her heart, so sympathetic and compassionate that she would weep if she saw a mouse, caught in a trap, dead or bleeding

Note—Sensibility was a mark of good-breeding in Chaucer's day. The Prioress's sensibility might have suggested touches to the author of the *Man of Feeling* or to Jane Austen.

Chaucer's Prioress took particular care to be courtly in her bearing and dignified in her manners.

(6) *The reule of Seint. . . . .*
. . . . , . *newe world the space.* (Line 173—176).

Modern English—The rule of St. Maure or of St.

Benedict being old and somewhat austere, this monk let old things pass, and held his course after the new world.

Chaucer paints the picture of a monk. The monk was an official in the monastery with the duties of a modern steward or bailiff. He was a manly man who might have been an efficient and brilliant abbot. His stable had some beautiful choice horses. When he rode his bridle jingled in the whistling wind as clear and also as loud, as does the chapel bell, in the place where as if this lord were the prior of the monastery. "At the call where this lord was the superior the rules of St. Bendict and St. Maur were observed; but since these rules were old and somewhat strict, he let them be regarded as obsolete and followed the newer fashions".

Note—In the Middle Ages there were four religious orders the Augustinian, the Basilian, the Benedictine and the Franciscan. St. Benet of Benedictus was the founder of the Benedictine order of monks. He died about 542. His pupil St. Maure, established the rule of St. Benedict in France. It was probably not observed in England until the latter half of the 7th century under the rule of Wilfrid, and St. Dunstan is responsible for insistence upon the rigid observance of all its precepts.

"The monk ignored the rule of St. Benet and St. Maure as being out of date. His aim was to keep up with the times".

(7) *He yaf nat of that... ....*
.... *...out of his cloystre.* (Lines 177—181).

Modern English—He gave not a plucked hen for that text which says that hunters are not holy men, or that a monk, when he is cloisterless (that is to say. a monk out of his cloister) is like a fish that is out of water.

Explanation—Chaucer portrays the picture of a Monk and tells us that he was a successful outrider and a hunter. He ignored the rule of St. Benet or St. Maure and let it pass as something old and outworn. He followed the fashion of the times. He did not care for the 'text' taken from a Decretal of Gratian "Sicut piscis sine aqua caret vita. ita sine monasterio monachus". The Scriptures do say that a monk cannot live out of his cloister without falling into deadly sins, any more than a fish can live out of water without dying. But the monk thought that this text was as valueless and negligible as a hen that had lost its feathers. Perhaps he was little interested in monastic life.

Note—(*i*) Chaucer perhaps refers to the text from St. Jerome's Commentary on the Psalms—"Esau was a hunter, therefore he was a sinner, and indeed we do not find in the Holy Scriptures a single pious hunter.

(*ii*) There is a difference of opinion about the reading 'Cloysterles". Some suggest "reccheless" meaning "careless". Tyrwhitt proposed to read "reghelles—without rule" but our reading is supported by a comparison with the parallel passage in the Mirour de l' Omme. (Lines 20845—20851).

(8) *What sholde he studie and* ....

....................*cost wolde he spare.* (Lines 184—192)

(*Punjab University 1954*).

Modern English—Why should he study, and make himself mad, always pouring into a book in his cloister or toil with his hands, and labour, as St. Augustine bids ? How may the world be served ? Let Augustine have his labour reserved to him. He was therefore rightly a hard rider ; he had greyhounds as swift as fowls in flight : all his pleasure was in hard riding, and in hunting the hare, for which he would spare no expenses.

Explanation—In Chaucer's description of a Monk we still have a representative in the fox-hunting country parson, a Monk proud of his horsemanship and his hounds, richly attired and found of good living rather than of study, certain, as Chaucer slyly hints, of early promotion to an abbacy, just one of those luxurious idle monks who roused the indignant denunciation of Wyclif.

The monk, as Chaucer points out, showed his disregard of the traditions of his order. He would study but little and would not bother much about the dictum of St. Augustine who would impose the duty of manual labour in his Regulation Seconda. He doubted whether by a life of the utmost strictness and simplicity, the world could be served. Therefore he preferred to be a hard rider and justified it by saying that "Monks and priests had originally been permitted to hunt only where game increased to such an extent as to damage the crops." This was always the case where the people were forbidden to destroy any game, hence the monks were never at a loss to justify their fovourite amusement. He had greyhounds as swift as a bird in flight, and was very fond of the hunting of the hare for which he would spare no pains and money.

Note—Chaucer has presented to us humour and sarcasm mixed together. The hobby of the Monk is described sarcastically.

Austin—St. Augustine of Hippo. He did not draw up a rule of monastic life. The one attributed to him was deduced from two of his letters. The duty of Manual labour is part of the so called Regula Seconda, contained in the second letter :

"Operentur a mane usque ad sextam, et a sexta usque ad nonam vacent lectione."

(9) *And for to festne his* ....
... . *forneys of a leed.* (Lines 195—202).

Modern English—And, to fasten his hood under his chin, he had a wonderful pin wrought of gold ; at the larger end there was a love knot. His head was bald, which shone like a glass ; and so did his face, as if it had been anointed. He was a fat lord and in good condition ; his eyes were bright and rolled in his head, and shone like the fire under a cauldron.

Explanation—Chaucer has presented to us a Monk who ignored the rule of St. Benet or St. Maure and bothered very little about the doctrine of St. Augustine. He was a carefree luxurious idle monk who was very much interested in hunting and justified his hobby by quoting the text. He was undoubtedly one of those monks who roused the Wyclifian criticism and condemnation.

His dress and face too told of luxury and joy. He had a gold pin to fasten his hood under his chin. At the larger end there was a twisted loop *i.e.* a love-knot. He was bald. His head shone as glass and his face was anointed. He was fat and healthy and rich. His eyes were bright and shining like the stars and glowed as the furnace of lead.

This humorous description of the Monk's dress, head, face, eyes and belly add to the picturesque portrayal of his character. Chaucer points the minute details and lets us smile at the colour and outlines of the picture.

(*10*) *For though a wydwe* ....
................*beltre than his rente*. (Lines 253—256).

Modern English—For though a widow had not so much as a shoe so pleasant was his 'In Principio' that he would have his farthing before he parted. His proceeds from his begging were greater than his regular income.

Explanation—After having described the Monk, Chaucer talks of a Friar who under the cloke of mendicancy covers

a deep-rooted love of money and selfish indulgence, being 'the beste beggere in his hous', who 'knew the tavernes well in every toun', and by his power of confession and absolution exerted unbounded influence over women old and young. So pleasant was his reading of the opening verses of the Gospel of St. John to which a magical value was attached, that even the poorest woman had to part away with the least she had and the Friar always got a gift. Thus the proceeds of his begging were much greater than the rent he paid to his convent. He made a considerable profit for himself.

Note (*i*) **In Principio**—The opening words of St. Johns Gospel ; of Jacke Upland, Wrights Pol. Poems and Songs :

"For ye win more by yeare with In Principio, than with all the rules that ever your patrones made."

(*ii*) **His purchas rente**—Taken from the *Roman de la Rosc* (Line 1/760) 'Miex vault mes pourchas que ma rente'

English Version : To wynnen is alwey myn entent.
My purchace is bettir than my rent.

(*11*) *And rage he koulde* ....
....*maister or a pope.* (Lines 257—261).

Modern English—He would play about wantonly as if he were a puppy dog. He dould be very helpful during days of obitration, for on such occasions he was not a reoluse with a threadbare cloak as is a poor scholar, but like a master or a Pope.

Explanation—Chaucer has nicely drawn an odious and contemptible figure of the Friar whose cloke of mendicancy covers a deep rooted love of money and selfish indulgence The Friar by his power of confession and absolution exerted unbounded influence over women old and young. He was a greater hypocrite than Chaucer's Pardoner or seller of indulgences.

This friar was as wanton as a cub. He could help much on love-days. He was an asset to the persons on the days appointed for the settlement of disputes by arbitration. At that time he did not think that he was an inmate of the cloister, with an outworn cope as a poor scholar is but he considered himself in authority and took himself to be no less than a Pope. He felt as if he was the recipient of the Degree of Master or Doctor which not only required a long course of study but also a lavish expense in feasting and presents. This made those, and also the Friar who could afford to take in rank as very dignified persons indeed.

(*12*) *His reasons he spak...* ... .
....*sheeldes selle.* (Lines 274—278).

Modren English—His opinions he uttered very pompously, ever tending to the increase of his profits. He desired that at any cost the sea between Middleburg and Orwell should be guarded. He knew well how to sell coins in exchange.

Explanation—Chaucer has described several personages with consummate skill. In a few lines we are made acquainted with their features and dress their manners and characters; they stand out before us in strong individuality, not like portraits in a picturegallery, but as men and women living, acting, talking with us. Here, we meet with a 'Merchant' acute in his dealings, and if not always prosperous, able to impress others with the belief that he is so. He can speak of little else than his business, but is cautious not to say too much.

The merchant gave his 'reasons' or opinions on English policy, and these were always affected by his idea as to what would be good for trade and so conduce the increase of his own profits. He wished that the sea between Middleburg and Orwell were protected against any hostile action. He was expert in selling his French shields at a profit to himself.

Note—**Betwixe Middleburgh and Orewelle**—Middleburgh is in the isle of Walcheren, nearly opposite the mouth of the Orwell on the English coast.

Prof. J. W. Hales : "We are told of the Merchant that he thought it of prime moment that the passage from Harwich to Middleburgh should be swept clear of pirates".

(*13*) *For him was... ....*
....*gold in cofre.* (Lines 293—298).

Modern English : It was dearer to him to have at the head of his bed wenty books, bound in black and red, of Aristotle and his philosophy rather than to have rich robes, or fiddles or gay psaltry. But although he was a philosopher, he had little gold in his coffers.

Explanation : To the class of the Parson, the Monk and the Friar, we must refer the 'Clerk of Oxenford' though as yet he had not got a benefice. He lived apart from the world, spending his little money on books, a poor but earnest scholar, grave and thoughtful in speech. He had long applied himself to logic, the principal subject in the Arts course at all medieval universities. He was still in need of his friends' help too pursue his studies, perhaps with a view to taking up the long course in Theology, but had probably taken his bachelor's degree in arts at Oxford. He would prefer to have twenty books of Aristotle and his philosophy bound red or black lying at the head of his bed rather than rich robes, fiddle or santrie, a small harp. But although he was a philosopher he had but little gold in his coffer. He was not very rich. Here is a hit at the astrologers of the day, whose philosophy consisted in trying to coin gold.

(*14*) *But al be that* ....
.... *and gladly teche.* (Lines 297—308).
(*Punjab University, 1955*).

Modern English—But although he was a philosopher, he had little gol l in his coffers. Nevertheless, whatever he might receive from his friends, he spent it on books and on learning, and earnestly prayed for the souls of those who gave him the means to carry on studies. He took great heed and care of his studies. He never said a word more than was necessary, and what he said was in due form and respectful in manner, short and brief and full of weighty matter. His speech tended towards moral virtues, and he was glad to learn and glad to teach.

Explanation—Chaucer's 'Clerk of Oxenford' had yet not got a benefice. He lived apart from the world, spending his little money on books, a poor but earnest scholar, grave and thoughtful in speech. He was a great logician and wanted to pursue Theology.

The clerk was no doubt a philosopher well groundded in logic and dabbled well in alchemy and metaphysics but his coffer was always empty. All that he could get from his friends he spent on books and on learning, and he earnestly and seriously prayed for the souls of those persons who gave him the means to pursue his study. Like all other poor students at the Universities in England and on the continent, he used to beg for his maintenance. He took the greatest care and heed of his studies He spoke what was just and necessary and never said a word which was more than required. All that he said was in due form and reverence and it was brief and living and deep and profound. He spoke of morals. He learnt gladly and so was he pleased to teach gladly. In fact the clerk was more a scholar than anything else.

(15) *Justice he was* ....
.................*not been infect.* (Lines 314—320).

Modern English—He had been a judge at assizes, by patent and plain commission. With his learning and his great repute he had many a fee and robe. There was

nowhere so great a purchaser of lands as he. To him all objects of purchase were practically estates in fee simple, so that his purchases could not be invalid.

Explanation—Chaucer's "The Sergeant of Law" is a clever and favourable picture of the shrewd and successful pleader, with every statute and precedent by rote, and possessing that element of success, the art of appearing even busier and wiser than he really was. With him there was a wealthy Frenkleyn or country gentleman, the prototype of the port-wine-loving squire of a bygone generation, at whose ample and hospitable board the lawyer had often sat and associated in the work of the sessions. He was a country magistrate, and had sat in Parliament as knight of his shire.

The 'Sergeant of Lawe' was not a parmanent judge of the court of king's Bench or Common pleas ; had he been so he could not have continued to plead. But when there were not enough judges of the superior courts to go on circuit he had often acted as an Assize judge by the king's letters patent (*i. e.* a document 'open' for any one to read, not closed like a letter to an individual) and commission. His commission was as full and unrestricted as if he were a judge of a superior court. He was so very well known for his legal knowledge and was so well renowned that his clients gave him robes in addition to his fees in money. He was a great buyer-up of land and property and there was none like him. He bought some rights over a property and converted it by chicanery into "fee simple", his skill enabling him to defeat any attempt to annul the purchase on the ground of fraud.

(*16*) *In terms hadde... . ...*
... .he pleyn by rote. (Lines 323—327).

Modern English—He knew, with their precise wording, all the legal cases and judgments which had been ruled since the times of King William. Besides, he could bring forward a legal charge and fake up a case ; no person could

find fault with his writing. He knew every statutes fully by heart.

Explanation—Chaucer has drawn a clever and favorable picture of 'The Sergeant of Lawe'. He was a shrewd and successful pleader, with every Statute and precedent by rote. He was sometimes the 'Judge of assise'. He was a very busy man and always he seemed busier than he was. He had all the Legal judgments from the time of William the Conqueror arranged under the terms when they were delivered and he could quote them also. He knew well how to fake up a law suit and how to make a draft which could not be easily challenged by the opponents. No one could find fault with his written deed or document. In fact flawless it was and it spoke of the great mastery of its author. He was an expert in Law and knew every statute by heart. Thus we find that he excelled alike in pleading and in the conduct of business or drawing out of deeds.

(*17*) *To lyven in debt.....................*
... . *he in his contree.* (Lines 335 – 340).

Modern English—To live in pleasure was ever his wont, for he was a very son of Epicurus who held the opinion that simple pleasure in truly perfect felicity. He was a house holder, and that a great one ; he was the St. Julian of his country-side.

Explanation—Chaucer's Franklin was a wealthy country gentleman, the prototype of the port-wine loving squire of a bygone generation, at whose ample and hospitable board the lawyer had often sat when associated in the work of the sessions. In the morning he would like to take a cake dipped in wine. He was very much like Epicurus, the Greek Philosopher, who taught, indeed that the highest good is pleasure, but indentified pleasure with the practice of virtue. He like the Epicureans was content with a small cup of light-wine, and was like St. Jullian always ready to provide his votaries with good lodgings and accommodation

of all sorts He was extremely hospitable. His house is likened to one of the rest houses of Jullian.

Note Epicurus—Was the Greek Philosopher of the 4th century B. C. He advocated that, "pleasure is the chief good and aim of life".

St. Julian—Under a misapprehension he murdered his parents. In atonement he founded a sumptous hospital for the entertainment of strangers. Hence he was called 'hospitator'. His name was given to many houses of rest for Travellers.

(*18*) *His table dormant in ....*
..................as morne milk. (Lines 353—358).

Modern English – All the long day his table ever stood fixed in his hall ready laid. He was a lord and master at the sessions; and very often he had been knight of the shire. At his girdle there hung a knife and pouchet of silk, as white as morning's milk.

Explanation—Chaucer has beautifully described the characteristics of his Franklin. The Franklin was an Epicurean and besides he was St. Julian. He was known for his hospitality.

The Franklin had a fixed table, as compared with one formed simply by boards laid across trestles and removed after each meal. He was so rich and prosperous that his table was always ready for any visitor. At the sittings of the law-courts he was lord and master; often he was the knight of the shire and represented his county in Parliament. 'He served his country as knight of the shire to his dying day'. He had a sort of knife as that worn by the artisans and did not wear a sword. He wore also a purse suspended from the belt by a cord or chain, a fashion that had come in with the crusades. That purse hanging from

his girdle was as white as morning milk contrasted with the darkness of night.

(*19*) *In sangwyn and in............*
..................gold in special. (Lines 439—444).

Modern English—He was all clad in red and blue, lined with taffeta and with thin silk. And yet he was moderate in his expenditure: he saved what he earned during the pestilence. As gold is a cordial in medicine, he loved gold above all other things.

Explanation—Chaucer's 'Doctor of Phisik' is a capital sketch of the physician of the day. A learned ostentatious charlatan, deeply versed in astrology, magic and all the useless lore of the dark ages, though.

His studie was but litle on the Bibel

Georgeously attired to command respect, temperate in his habits, and not wanting in worldly wisdom, for 'ful redy hadde he his opotecaries' and 'each of hem made other for to wynne:' a practice which is not quite extinct in our own time, though repudiated by every honourable practitioner.

Chaucer here slyly suggests that the Doctor was dressed in Scarlet, blood red and peach (blossom) colour (dark blue) clothes lined with fine thin silk (Taffata) or Sendal, the fine silk imported from India. He was moderate in expenditure and he saved whatever he acquired during the last pestilence of 1348—49. The Black Death). He had a passion for gold because drinkable gold (aurum potabile) was a sovereign remedy in some cases and was supposed to heal and strengthen the heart.

Note—In Pakistan the 'Kushta' (کشتہ) of gold is said to be health giving.

This passage is a fine example of Chaucer's sly homour.

(20) *But she was somdel . ...*
......................of alle charitee. (Lines 446—452).
(*Punjab University. 1952*).

Modern English—She was a little deaf, and that was a misfortune. She had such skill in cloth-making, that she surpassed them of ypres and Ghent. There was no woman in all the Parish who should take precedence of her in giving alms at the oftertory; and if any did to be sure she was so wrath that she was out of all charity.

Explanation—Chaucer's 'The Wyf of Bathe' is besides the 'Lady Prioresse' and her attendant nun, of whom, however, we have no description—the only female personage in the company. It seems strange that Chaucer, who elsewhere shows his high estimation of womanly virtue, and especially of good wives, should not have given some other female characters, corresponding, for example, to the Manciple or the Frankleyn. If not a caricature, and there is no reason to suppose her to be such, she presents a dark picture of the morality of woman of her class. A well-to-do cloth-worker from the west of England, trading on her own account, she belongs to the same grade of society as the group of city liverymen. Voilent in temper, bold and wanton in dress and manners, loud, coarse, and loose, in her language and as loose in her morals, she is a living satire on the mere conventional observance of the externals of religion, having visited Rome and the Holy Sepulchre, as well as the chief shrines of the continent, and being regular in her attendance at the church in the superstitious rites of Relic Sunday, on which occasion she often gave way to her proud and overbearing disposition.

Chaucer makes his Wife of Bath deaf and shows pity for her deafness because it was the result of a blow received from her fifth husband who, while reading out sarcasms on women from an old book, suddenly found himself knocked

into the fire and three leaves torn out of his precious manuscript. She was expert in cloth making which was at that time one of the chief west-county industries. She was cleverer than the workmen who came over to teach her from ypres and Ghent, the centres of wool industry. She was the richest lady of the country and she led the woman who went up to the altar in the order of their social rank. And if someone tried to take her position—she became very angry and forgot all about Christian Love.

(21) *This noble ensample* ....
....*shall iren doo?* (Lines 496—500).
(*Punjab University. 1955*).

Modern English—The noble example he gave to his sheep, that first he practised and then he taught; these words he took out of the Gospel and added this simile to it that if gold rust, what shall iron do ?

Explanation—Prof Skeat remarks that "Chaucer, in his description of the parson, contrasts the piety and industry of the secular clergy with the wickedness and laziness of the religious orders or monks". Chaucer has left us in the character of the 'poure Persoun of a toun' a picture of simple, unselfish piety, such as has never been surpassed. Poor in this world's goods, 'but riche of holy thought and work", brother to a plowman, but "a learned man, a clerk", (*i.e.* a University man), "that Cristes gospel trewely wolde prech," liberal to the poor, though poor himself ; self denying and contented with his lot; he did not seek preferment, but endeavoured by gentleness and sympathy, by well judged remonstrance, and above all by his own good example, "to drawe folk to heven" his character is beautifully summed up in the last couplet :

"But Cristes lore, and his apostles twelve
He taught, but first he folwede it himself".

He set such a noble example to his followers and the persons who were under his care that he was the first to act

and than to teach. He believed that example is better than precept. Out of the Bible he collected these words and then added a simile to them : that if gold gets rusty, what about iron ?

Note—tho words—"Whosoever shall do and teach them commandments), the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven". (St. Matthew).

If gold rust............do ?—If the clergy were corrupt, what to say of the common folk.

(22) *He sette not........................*
.....................to been with holde. (Lines 507—511).

Modern English—He did not farm out his benefice, or leave his sheep stuck in the mire, and run to London, to St. Paul's to get a chantry for souls, or to be retained by some guild.

Explanation—This passage refers to a common practice in Chaucer's days. The parish priest hired strangers to look after their duties in the parish and themselves went to London to be employed as chantry priests. A chantry was a chapel endowed by a founder for a priest to say masses to his departed soul after his death or to those of his friends and relatives. This became a common practice because the stipend for chantry priest was about the same as in the parish but without any parochial duties; because the priest by hiring a stranger for his parish could add part of that stipend to his chantry income ; and because life in the parish was extremely dull in those days. There was a great demand for chantry priests in Chaucer's days.

Chaucer's Parson did not leave his parish in charge of a deputy while he went in search of more lucrative employment. He did not let his parishioners sink into evil and corruption and run to St. Pauls in London to get the office of a chantry priest and to say 'mass' for the souls of the

founders of the chantry chapel or to withdraw from the world like a monk but he dwelt at home and ministered to the spiritual needs of his parishioners so that no heresy might make way among them. In fact he did not pretend to serve the world by withdrawing from it like a monk.

Note—Unto Seint Paules—According to Dugdale there were thirty five chantries at St. Paul's served by fifty four priests.

(23) *He was to synful*....................
.... *nowher noon ys.* (Lines 516—524).

Modern English—He was not contemptuous towards sinners, nor aggressive nor haughty in his speech, but always balanced and kind in his teaching. To draw people to heaven by goodness and by virtuous example, this was his aim. But if it happened that any person was obstinate, whoever he was, whether of high or low estate, he would chide him sharply on occasions. I am sure there is nowhere a better priest.

Explanation—In the character of the parson Chaucer draws a picture of simple, unselfish piety as has never been surpassed. The Parson was poor but rich in thought. He was a learned man, a scholar who would truly preach Christ's gospel. He would earnestly teach his parishioners. He was kind and diligent and fully patient in adversity. He was a noble example to his people. He never leased out his ecclesiastical living to a stranger. He was a shepherd and not a hireling. He was holy and virtuous but was never merciless and cruel to the sinner, nor was he haughty and domineering and scornfull in speech but wise and gracious in teaching. It was his task to draw people to heaven by beauty of life, and by a fair example. But if a person happened to be stubborn, no matter whether he was high or low in state he would snub him sharply for the time being.

Chaucer, perhaps, was right in thinking that there was no better priest there.

(24) *The Reeve was a.............. ..*
....no calf ysene. (Lines 587—592).

Modern English—The Reeve was a slender choleric man ; his beard was shaved as closely as could be ; his hair was cropped around his ears, and the top docked in front like that of a priest. His legs were long and very lean, like a staff no calf being visible.

Explanation—Chaucer's Reeve is utterly unscropulous an 'unjust steward' overbearing to his inferiors serving his master efficiently, though from motives purely selfish, and abusing the confidence with his ability earned him for the purpose of lining his own nest. It is fortunate that Chaucer's sketch of the Reeve presents no difficulties, as materials for illustrating it are usually scanty. The name of the Reeve was Oswald and he came from one of the eastered countries. He was a lean and thin and an irritable man. His beard was shaven as closely as he ever could shave it. His hair was cropped short round by his ears. His skull was shaved like that of a priest. His legs were quite long and lean like a staff and no calf was visible. (Calf=the thick fleshy part of the leg behind).

(25) *And eek ye ....*
...................men noght fynde. (Lines 642—648).

Modern English—And as you know well, a jav can call 'wat' as well as the pope. But if anyone probed him in some other point, then he had all his bearing spent. 'Questio Quid Juris' he would ever cry. He was a gentle and kind rogue ; men may not find a better fellow.

Explanation—Chaucer has beautifully pointed the picture of a Summoner, an officer of the ecclesiastical courts, a low ignorant and dissolute bully, who holds a terrible power

over 'the yonge gurles of his diocese' inspite of his repulsive appearance and character. When he was intoxicated, he would then speak nothing but Latin ; he knew a few Latin terms, two or three, which he had picked up from some statute. He repeated those terms just as a jay or a parrot can call walter *i.e.*, can repeat a phrase by rote. But if anybody tested him in other things, he would fail miserably. After having stated his case, he added 'Quid Juris' ? and then proceeded to give the answer to it. He would cry : 'I question ; what is the Law ?' He was a gentle and kind fellow—a better fellow one should not find.

(26) *And privelý a ....* ....

....*helle' seyde he.* (Lines 651—657).

(*Punjab University 1953*).

Modern English : And privately he could swindle an unsuspecting person. And if anywhere he found a jolly fellow he would advise him to have no fear in such cases of the ex-communication of the archdeacon, unless a person's soul were in his purse, for the should be punished only in his purse. 'Purse in the hell of archdeacon' he would cry.

Explanation : The Summoner was the officer of the ecclesiastical court of the Bishop, or his subordinate the Archdeacon. The court dealt with sins of immorality, witchcraft, usury, simony, neglect of the sacraments. The Archdeacon extorted fines by threats of ex-communication. The Summoners made a living for themselves, over and above their lawful fees, by threatening to report people to the Archdeacon for real or imaginary offences.

This Summoner of Chaucer is a rogue. He could plunder and cheat a foolish fellow. If he found a good fellow he would teach him to have no fear of the curse of the Archdeacon unless he minded paying a sum and buying off the penalty *i. e.* if he were not too much set on his money, he might purchase exemption. He told him that if he would be punished in his purse only ; and that he would not to go to hell ; the only hell would be the payment of money.

This shows that even the Archdeacon was not free from corruption.

(27) *But of his craft...... .... :*
.... was oure lady veyl. (Lines 691—695.)

Modern English—But as for his trade, there was no such other pardoner between Berwick and Ware; for in his bag he had a pillow case which he said was the veil of our lady.

Explanation—Chaucer's Pardoner is a contemptible and hypocritical seller of indulgences. His wallet is bretful of pardouns come from Rome al hoot', and he has an inexhaustible stock of reliques and bones, which the poet insinuates are those of pigs, not saints. From Brewick-on Tweed in the north, to Ware near London, from one end of England to another, there was not another pardoner. In his bag he had a pillow case which he said was the veil of Virgin Mary. In fact he was a cheat of the first order.

This shows that any rubbish was palmed off upon the ignorant piety of the pilgrimes as genuine relics of Christ, Virgin Mary and the Saints.

(28) *He seyd he..................... .....*
.... the peple his apes. (Lines 696—706).
(*Punjab University 1953*).

Modern English—He also said that he had a piece of the sail used by St. Peter when he went out upon the sea till Jesus Christ caught him. He had a cross of latten set with stones, and some pig's bones in a glass. But with these relics, when he found a poor person dwelling on land, he got out of him more money than that person earned in two months. And thus with feigned flattery and tricks he made that person, and other people, his dupes.

Explanation—Chaucer's Pardoner was a cheat of the highest order. From one end of England to the other he went with a wallet and a pillow-case describing it as Mary's veil. In his wallet he had the pieces of sail that St. Peter had when he went upon the sea when Christ caught him.

He had a cross made of brass and copper and some stones were studded in it; he had in a glass some pig bones. When he met a poor and innocent man in the country, he showed these relics to him and extracted from him more money than he could earn in two months Thus with feigned flattery and jests he made the fool of the people.

(29) *Wel koude he rede... ....*
.... murierly and loude. (Lines 709—714).
(*Punjab University 1956*).

Modern English—He could read well a lesson or a story, but best of all he sang an offertory; for he knew well when the sung was song, he must preach and polish his tongue well, to win as much silver as he can. Therefore he sang merrily and loudly.

Explanation—Chaucer has painted his rogue in true colours. The pardoner was a cheat and he very well knew the tricks of deceiving people. But in the church he was a noble ecclesiast. He could very well read a passage from the Bible or could nicely narrate a story from the lives of Saints. In the Mass before the bread and wine were brought to the altar, he sang the anthem, the offertory. He gave the sermons also with a smooth tongue. With his polished words and phrases he knew how to extract money from the people. Money came to him and so he sang loudly and merrily.

(Add in the beginning of the Explanation the first Para of Expl. 27)

(30) *For this ye known ....* .....
(*Punjab University 1953*).

Modern English—For you know this as much as I do that whoever will reproduce, a tale narrated by a man must reproduce, as near as he can, every word, if it be his responsibility, although he speak never so rudely and freely. Or otherwise he must tell his tale falsely, or feign, or find new words. He may not spare any, even if it were his own brother. He must say one word as well as another.

Explanation—Chaucer after having described the pilgrims in detail, proceeds to tell us apologetically that he must stick to the truth however unpleasant it may be. That is what he intends to do, and should be forgiven if persons and things described are sometimes disagreeable.

Chaucer requests the readers not to impute any want of breeding if he speaks plainly about the people. He tells them that they as well as he very well know that whosoever tells the story of a man, must relate as closely as ever he can every single word; if he is charged with it although he never spoke so rudely or freely, or otherwise he shall make the story untrue or make up things or find new words. He may not spare one although one might be his brother. He should as well say one word as another.

(*31*) *Amorwe, whan that*....................
..........................*if you leste.* (Lines 822—828).
(*Punjab University 1952*).

Modern English—On the morrow, when the day began to spring, our host arose and acted as a cook to us all, assembled us together, all in a flock, and we rode forth, a little faster than a walk, upto the watering of St. Thomas. And there our host drew up his horse, and said, "Sirs, listen; if you will".

Explanation—In the Pilgrimage to Canterbury, Chaucer tells us that the Host is elected the leader of the party Early next morning he gets them together and they start on their pilgrimage. On reaching 'the watering of St. Thomas' he casts lots to settle the order of the narrator of two tales on the way to Pilgrimage as it was decided that to pass away the time pleassantly and to make the journey light it was incumbent on each pilgrim to tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two their way back.

Note—Wateryiug of St. Thomas—a book near the second milestone on the Canterbury Road, where pilgrims watered their horses.

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